

Forget Being the **VILLAINESS,** I Want to Be an **ADVENTURER!**



2

Author
Hiro Oda

Illustrator
Tobi



Forget Being the **VILLAINESS,** I Want to Be an **ADVENTURER!**



2

Author
Hiro Oda

Illustrator
Tobi

Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Chapter 1: Fourteen Years Old](#)

[Chapter 2: Knight School, Year Two](#)

[Intermission: Boys' Night!](#)

[Chapter 3: The Summons](#)

[Chapter 4: All Alone](#)

[Chapter 5: Arrival in Marsche](#)

[Chapter 6: Meeting with the Saint](#)

[Chapter 7: The Promised Sixteenth](#)

[Intermission: Boys' Night! Marsche Edition](#)

[Chapter 8: Reunion with Gillain](#)

[Chapter 9: Return from Overseas](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Color Illustrations](#)

[Bonus High Resolution Illustrations](#)

[About J-Novel Club](#)

[Copyright](#)

Chapter 1: Fourteen Years Old

Good day, everybody. I, Serephione Granzeus, made it to the age of fourteen!

I met Lou the holy beast when I was three years old, and at that moment, I remembered that I had been a woman of around thirty from Japan in my past life. I also realized that I had been reborn in a world just like a fantasy book I'd read called *I Love You, My Wild Rose*—*Wild Rose* for short—and I was in the role of the villainess!

For some reason, in addition to my memories from my past life, I also remembered the life that the Serephione from the book had gone through. Far from being a villainess, the original Serephione had lived a sincere and earnest life in a world that was far more stifling than Japan. But when the heroine, Maribelle, came around, Serephione's entire beloved family, including her fiancé, turned against her. All that was left for her was a bottomless pit of loneliness and despair...

I decided I *definitely* didn't want to become the villainess, so with the help of Lou and my family, in order to not encounter the heroine, I avoided going into the magic academy, I trained hard, and I enrolled in knight school last year. Since then, Lou and I had been completing guild commissions, playing hard, and studying hard. I was going into my second year this spring.

During my break before the new school year, my father, an earl and the Minister of Finance for the Kingdom of Judore, called our family to the Granzeus mansion for a long-awaited get-together. Besides my father and I, there was my brother Larouza, who was strong, kind, righteous, and shared my facial features. He was still a civil servant at the library, but he spent all of his paid time off going around ruins and remote areas all across the world, collecting rare materials and books. There was also Erza Trundle, the master of the renowned Trundle family. She was a doting grandmother to me and Larouza and a passionate servant to Lou.

Following a relaxed meal, we gathered around the fireplace in the lounge. The three adults enjoyed a fine whiskey made in Granzeus territory, and Lou and I munched on cakes made by our master chef Matsuki.

“So, you snuck into the Dysetzu Commonwealth in the north recently to survey the glaciers, right?” I asked my brother.

“Yeah. There was something I was looking for there, plus I wanted to test if I could make ice as cold as the permafrost there with magic. The minus-two-hundred degree barrier is hard to break through.”

“You always do such reckless things...” My grandmother furrowed her brows in concern—but a faint smile played at her lips.

“Well, as a bonus, I dug up a few things from the glaciers and icebergs. Take a look. Should I put the whole mammoth on display in the territory?”

“Good idea. The children will be happy. More than anything, I’m just glad you’re doing well, Larouza,” my father answered with a smile.

He and my brother looked more like brothers than father and son. At twenty years old, my brother was all grown up now. His hair had grown down to his shoulders, and in contrast to my courtly clean-cut father, he sported a five-o’clock shadow. Despite his exhausted appearance, however, his expression softened when he visited home.

Indeed, these two different types of handsome, black-haired, green-eyed men were drinking together. I wished someone would praise me for not swooning and spurting blood from my nose.

My brother took the spoils from his trip to the glaciers (apart from the mammoth) out of his Magic Room, so I looked over them one by one with Lou.

These perfectly round brown balls... Aren’t these dinosaur eggs? If I hatched one, maybe I could start a completely new story in the “dinosaurs come back to life in the modern era” genre? That would totally throw the plot of Wild Rose off the rails!

I pressed one to my heart and silently prayed, *Hatch, hatch!* I had cheat powers, after all!

“Sere, I hate to burst your bubble, but that’s fossilized elephant poop,” Lou informed me.

“...”

“Father, grandmother, Serephione, can I talk to you about something?” My brother set his glass on the table and put his hands together. “The reason I went to the far north this last time is because I found a document about one of the holy beasts.”

Lou stopped eating his cake and looked up.

“It was a detailed description of one of the holy beasts. I believe it was probably written by a former contractor. The document was detailed enough that I could identify where it lives.”

“Larouza, you went to look for a holy beast? In the north?” my grandmother asked.

The holy beast of the north...according to my past life knowledge, that would be the Black Tortoise.

“It’s true that he tends not to move from one place, but humans aren’t meant to seek out holy beasts. Holy beasts choose humans. Looking for one is disrespectful, Larouza,” said Lou sternly. I nervously interpreted for him.

“I understand why you would scold me. But, as we know from Prince Gillain and Asu, we can’t hide Serephione and Lou from people who are in a contractor or master-servant relationship with a holy beast—and I know she would like to complete her pilgrimage without standing out too much. I wanted to take some kind of countermeasure in case there really was a holy beast there. I can’t deny that I considered taking it as a servant myself since that might keep someone with bad intentions from targeting Serephione with it.”

So that’s been his goal this whole time he was reading secret books, ever since his days in the academy... It was all to protect me and Lou, including the information-gathering and strength training...

Lou calmed down. “You have a point.”

“So, did you see him?” I asked.

“Things didn’t go quite as planned. He wasn’t in the sacred area that I looked in. I’m sure that I had the right place, though. There was a sense of purity in the air, just like our mansion where Lou lives.”

Larouza didn’t see the holy beast... Too bad.

“However...I saw footprints in its territory that looked like someone had been there recently. I believe someone else reached the same area I did within the last year or so.”

“Huh?”

“So, someone beat you to it, Larouza?” my grandmother asked.

My brother nodded, eliciting bloodlust from my grandmother. A chill of dread ran through my body as well.

“Does that mean somebody else found the holy beast of the north recently and took it as their servant?” my father asked.

“It’s a possibility. Prince Gillain is a good example. Please tell me what you think, Lou.”

“Like I said before, he doesn’t move around for the most part,” replied Lou. “If he’s not there...then that must be what happened.”

“To take a holy beast as one’s servant requires at least as much magical power as Serephi, if not more. Who else in this world could have that kind of power?” My father knit his eyebrows.

It could be Maribelle, the heroine of Wild Rose... The Black Tortoise didn’t appear in the original story, but Maribelle had an unusually strong inclination toward holy beasts. Lou and I had distanced ourselves from her after a near miss with her frightening charm ability.

But it could actually be scarier if it *weren’t* Maribelle. Who could have done that, and why? I couldn’t even begin to imagine. Were they an enemy? Or on my side?

I rested my elbows on my lap and put my hands over my face. As I closed my eyes and tried to push the worst-case scenarios out of my mind, I felt myself suddenly lifted into the air and surrounded by warmth.

“What’s wrong, Serephione? You have me,” my brother reassured me. “Don’t worry. I promise I’ll look after you and Lou as long as I live, okay?”

I lifted my face, and my brother kissed my forehead, then gently rocked me in his lap as if soothing a child. The lapis lazuli necklace at his chest glimmered. His stubble brushed against my cheek. I put my hand up to it as if to make sure it was really there.

This is different from Wild Rose, right?

My brother had never grown facial hair in the book. When he went to the academy then, we had fewer and fewer chances to see each other. On the day I was convicted, he had stood next to Maribelle, and when Cecil was bullying me, he acted as a barrier to keep Maribelle from seeing me in that unsightly state. He cared only for Maribelle, never sparing me so much as a glance...

His eyes were the same emerald green. I had once thought they would grow cold, but right now, they were like a warm, refreshing breeze.

“Is something wrong? You’re staring into my eyes so intently, Serephione.”

“I was just thinking that your eyes are really pretty, like jewels... I’ve always wished I had eyes that match yours and father’s.”

A Serephione without black eyes would hardly be Serephione at all. If I hadn’t been born with black eyes...my life would have been a bit easier.

“I like your eyes,” my brother replied. “People need the darkness of night to rest. Your gentle black eyes are my comfort.”

“Your brother is right, Serephi,” my grandmother agreed. “The Trundle black that you inherited from your mother is a symbol of strength. And strength, my dear, is underpinned by love.”

“The darkness of your eyes holds the stars that light my way and keep me from straying from my path, my beloved Serephi,” my father reassured me.

Lou got onto my shoulder, licked my eyelid, and nuzzled my cheek.

Surrounded by my beloved family and my fluffball, I felt just how warm my home was.

Chapter 2: Knight School, Year Two

Alma and I made it to our second year of knight school in the spring. We were even in the same class! Yay! Nick was with us too, and our teacher Kodak moved up with us.

Unfortunately, there were no girls in the incoming class. That made me and Alma the only girls in the school.

I gazed at the gold ring on my left pinky finger. It was a token of friendship between us four girls in knight school.

Before Elise and Sasara graduated, Alma brought in a lump of gold and asked for the Granzeus family's help. She had apparently been searching for an ore that was easy to manipulate during her guild commission work on her days off.

"This is a bit embarrassing, but...I want to use this gold to make something that connects the four of us. I just don't know anybody who can do that..."

I was so moved that I teared up. It was clear how much Alma treasured the friendship between the four of us. I could be sure now that it wasn't just me who felt that way.

Gold was valuable, even in this world. We could have sold this lump for ten million gold coins. Alma had chosen our friendship over money.

I gladly asked for my father's help, and he introduced me to a goldsmith. I then had four dainty rings made, engraved with an ivy pattern resembling the vines that surrounded the knight school. They were to be worn on the pinky finger of the non-dominant hand so they wouldn't interfere with combat.

When I got them from the goldsmith, I secretly cast a new kind of magic on them. It would detect when one of the other three was on the verge of death and release an electric shock toward the culprit. At first, I considered making it notify me in times of crisis so I could come running, but then I realized that I wouldn't necessarily be alive by then.

On the morning of the graduation ceremony, Elise and Sasara hugged me and

Alma, wearing their rings. I prayed that the rings would protect the first close friends I ever made, even if I were no longer around.

And then, there was my other new accessory—though it was too serious to call it that—Gillain’s plate.

Every time I touched it or looked at it, I remembered that magical snowy night, and I either turned red, turned white, went into the fetal position, or made a strange squeak from the sheer embarrassment.

“Ah, to be young...”

“You know, Asu, some kids these days take the ‘o’ out to be hip.”

“For real? That’s wild.”

“Quit fooling around, you two! I’m done putting up with your attitude! And Gillain deserves to grow a stupid little mustache for making me feel this way!”

“Sere! My bad! That’s not funny when you say it! Quit using magic in your words!”

“Sere! Don’t bring Gillain into this! He’ll make me the scapegoat! It’s your beast that’s getting carried away!”

Though he sent Asu over from time to time, Gillain was respecting my wish to keep trying in my current situation for a while longer.

Could I become strong enough to stand at Gillain’s side in just two years? Would Gillain even need me in two years? And if, after I turned seventeen in three years, the day came where I was convicted...could I still be loved by somebody?

All right, time for lunch. Sitting at our table was me, Alma, Lou, and...Cecil. He was in our class this year.

“I’m honored that I get to eat lunch with the great Serephione! Somebody kick me so I know if I’m dreaming!”

Alma glared at her blood-related brother with a look of scorn that had grown even more polished since going into her second year.

Lou glanced at Cecil and then let out a sad sigh from my shoulder. He wasn't being very talkative today.

"Cecil, give me the report I asked for! Accurately and concisely!" I ordered.

"Yes! Per your orders, I attended the flower-viewing party at the royal palace!"

Cecil was becoming my obedient dog—but not because I steered him in that direction! This perv was just too much for me to handle!

"All high-ranking nobles and people in important positions were invited. I didn't see Count Granzeus in attendance."

Of course my papa wouldn't go. He might fall under Maribelle's spell.

"Oh, and Prince Schneider made a rare appearance. He was there for about fifteen minutes. The queen seemed somewhat tense while he was there. He appeared to be in good health."

Well, his illness is a cover story, after all...

"I received an invitation as a friend of Prince Gardner's."

I nodded as I brought a forkful of salad to my mouth.

"Other than me, Prince Gardner invited Isabella, of course, and Maribelle as well."

"How was the drill lady? Was she doing well?" Alma asked as she wolfed down her bread. She seemed to care about Isabella as a fellow noble lady.

"Isabella came in an elegant, unassuming pink dress. She was quietly looking at the flowers outside the circle, but in the next moment, she was surrounded by ladies telling her how nice her outfit looked on her."

I designed it, after all!

"As for Maribelle, who Serephione was interested in, she stuck by the prince's side the whole time and chatted with him and some of the boys from the academy."

"Who were those other boys?" I asked.

"Cain, the second son of Marquis Duel, and Harry, the oldest son of Viscount

Wentz.”

Those two were the prime minister’s son and his dog. That seemed like a small friend group to me, but it made sense since my brother, the magician, and Cecil, the macho man, were missing from their clique.

“And what about the mission I assigned you?”

“I completed all three steps, of course. Firstly, I went in my knight school uniform to say hello to Maribelle and have a polite conversation with her. Secondly, I put some distance between us and stared at her for three minutes per your instructions. Thirdly, I went up to her again at the end of the party, shook her hand, and told her that she’s as beautiful as a wild rose.”

“Good job. What was Maribelle like?”

“She said to me, ‘You could be a military commander as soon as you graduate with your skill. Would you protect me with your lance?’ I’m long past the times where I rode on horseback and took down my foes with a lance, though... I haven’t picked up anything besides a bow and arrow since I started school. Of course, the reason I chose archery was to have more time with you... He he.”

Alma, Lou, and I had nothing to say in response.

“I asked her, ‘If you’re an advanced magician, why would I need to protect you?’ She said, ‘My magic isn’t for hurting people, so I need a strong knight to protect me.’”

“Huh... So what did you say then?”

“I told her, ‘Knights do not protect the strong. The people I protect are those with no magic or power.’”

“Cecil said something sensible!” Alma opened her eyes wide.

“What did Maribelle say?”

“Something like, ‘That’s weird, it isn’t working.’”

“I see... So, what did you think of Maribelle by the end? Do you think she’s queen material?”

“She’s just average, apart from her advanced magic level. She always brought

up the same stuff about me being a military commander, so I think she might not be all that bright. It also put me off how casually she spoke with a man she's only met a couple times. Her handshake was weak; if somebody were going to hit me, I'd rather it be someone with a callused hand from sword fighting, like you or Alma. I imagine the position of queen is difficult, so I think someone like Isabella, who is taking her regal studies seriously, would be better for the security of our kingdom."

"But she's cute, right? Enough so that the prince is interested in her. You didn't want her badly enough to push the prince aside?"

"I don't have the same tastes as the prince. I admire strong girls more than cute girls." Cecil looked at us with his head tilted down and blushed.

Don't act like a shy maiden when you're thirty centimeters taller than me!

"Makes sense. Good work, Cecil. Have this as thanks!" I handed him my vanilla ice cream.

"Ah, Serephione! I'll never forget this day as long as I live!"

"Why did you give him ice cream as a reward, Serephi?" Alma asked.

"I don't want to give Cecil anything that will be around for long."

"Makes sense."

Cecil ate his ice cream cheerfully, putting a hand to his cheek with tears of joy in his eyes.

One ice cream was a small price to pay for Cecil to happily work for me. The way Cecil treated me violently in the novel was burned into my mind, but now, I could use him as somebody in Prince Gardner's inner circle.

He could potentially become my enemy again in the future, but I honestly didn't care. If he betrayed me, I'd just crush him with my full power. So long as he didn't turn on me, I didn't plan to regard him as an enemy. He was my sweetheart Alma's twin brother, after all.

He had spoken with Maribelle at close range. He had looked at her, and he had touched her, but Cecil's feelings toward Maribelle hadn't shifted a bit. Cecil was...in the clear, for now.

“That concludes the experiment. Lou...prepare yourself.”

Lou said nothing.

And so, on a lovely spring day off at the Granzeus mansion...I kicked my beloved Lou and papa in their heads...



“If you can’t take this job, I can pass it on to one of the other guilds we’re partnered with,” Ms. Lara informed me.

“Hmm. Well, it shouldn’t be a problem if I can get permission to take time off school...”

The guild had summoned me for what turned out to be a job request.

A-rank adventurers received all kinds of privileges by virtue of their ability to take on difficult jobs. In return, they were obligated to accept work whenever the kingdom or local government requested them to.

This request was specifically for a female adventurer of at least A-rank, which was a strict condition. There *were* women A-rank and above, but they were seldom able to take on work at a moment’s notice. Firstly, many had families—it would be difficult to do overnight jobs if you had children. Also, many high-ranking women were active in society and couldn’t leave their jobs normally. My grandmother and the female bodyguards of important people were good examples.

“Why does it have to be a woman?”

“Well, the job is to escort the princess of Marsche to the magic academy. It would start from the border and take about three days to get there. Her escort would have to stay with her even in the bedroom and bathroom, so that’s why.”

“Why can’t she take a skilled female servant? Letting an adventurer into a princess’s bedroom is a bit out of the ordinary... I think it would be better to ask the kingdom of Judore to assign her a female knight.”

“I imagine she doesn’t want to owe anything to another kingdom. If she hires an adventurer, all she has to do is pay their wage.”

“Why is she going to the academy?”

“She’s going on exchange. The princess is eleven years old. I assume they’ll let her enroll as a special exception.”

A foreign exchange student—it reminded me of Gillain. But still...it was the magic academy, my weakness.

“Sere, you can’t go to the academy,” Lou said sternly.

But I was always asking unreasonable favors from the guild, and even if they did have scary faces, they were kind to Nick and Alma. And if we were dealing with the head of a kingdom, they probably had a good amount of money to drop on the guild.

“Ms. Lara, I can’t go to the magic academy, even with good reason. I can escort her, but only from the border to the capital. Also, they can’t leak any of my information. I’d like to be a woman of many secrets.”

“Ahh, how lovely of you, Serephi! Okay! I’ll tell the client.”



I—or rather, Lou and I—met the people we would be escorting at a town near the border. There was one coachman, two guards, and the princess. I knelt down.

“Nice to meet you. My name is Serephone. I belong to Trundle Guild of the Kingdom of Judore. I will do my utmost to protect you on our short trip together.”

The princess was bigger than me...even though she was three years younger! Darn it! She widened her eyes and exchanged a glance with the large man standing next to her who had long black hair tied back at his collar.

He drew his sword and slashed at me from above. I lightly jumped out of the way and kicked his wrist with my left foot, knocking his sword out of his hand. Then I put my knife to the left side of his neck.

“Gh...” The man cowered. This had only taken a few seconds. I supposed it was a test of my abilities.

“Um... Are you dissatisfied with me?”

The princess snapped back to normal and shook her head from side to side. “Oh, certainly not! Thank you for coming, Serephione. My name is Tomoe. I apologize for putting you through that.”

“It seems like you have...reasons, so I won’t ask. If you don’t mind, though, could you tell me what kind of danger to expect?”

I had planned to guard the carriage from horseback, but she really hadn’t brought any female servants, so I rode in the carriage with her. We set off with the two guards at our front and rear. If everything went as planned, we would only have to stay one night at a town along the way before we made it to the capital the next night. Someone from the academy would pick her up once we got to the capital.

“Um... Are you really fourteen, Serephione?” As I was thinking about what route to take, Tomoe spoke up nervously.

Between Tomoe’s hip-length black hair, her brown eyes, and her name, she resembled what I was familiar with in my past life in an endearing way. She looked like an older elementary schooler. The people of Marsche almost all had black hair, so I felt a certain kinship with them.

“Yes. I may be small, but I’m fourteen.”

“How old were you when you became an adventurer?”

“I joined my guild at eleven.”

“Even though you’re a noble lady?”

It hadn’t even been a day, but it seemed she’d looked into my background. She’d even found out that I was a noble.

“I can’t know for sure how long I can stay a noble lady.”

“Oh... By the way, your clothes look like the ones from my country.”

I was in my gray ninja outfit so I could be ready for anything.

“Oh, yes, my brother referenced Marschean clothes when he made them. Apparently, there was an exchange student from Marsche when he attended the magic academy.”

“Ah... That must have been Kenji.” A look of pain flashed across Tomoe’s eyes. “Kenji is...not with us anymore. My favorite serving woman killed him. Our kingdom is in great turmoil. I wish I didn’t have to come on this exchange, but it’s customary...”

Whoa, a heavy topic! I don’t want to hear any more...but I suppose I have to. Sniffle.

“That means you’ll be targeted during this trip.”

Tomoe nodded.

“Who exactly is targeting you?”

It’s not Galé, is it? Are they planning to take over Marsche before invading Judore?

“The prime minister. My brother, the Fourth Prince, was born three years ago to the prime minister’s daughter, which makes him the prime minister’s grandson.”

“Oh, a typical family feud.”

So it’s not the emperor... Sorry to doubt you, Gillain.

“How have you been targeted so far?”

“Mainly poison.”

My grandmother’s concern was spot on...

“Also...they set up accidents on the road to kill me.”

Hm? On the road? Like...the one we’re traveling on right now? I heard the sound of four, no, five horses approaching.

“Sere,” warned Lou.

“Yeah,” I responded. “Your Majesty, what would you like me to do with your enemies? Take them alive? Or would you rather I kill them?”

“Huh?”

“I will act according to your request. They’re coming. Answer me in three seconds! One, two...”

“D-Don’t kill them!”

“Understood. Don’t move from this spot.”

I cast a defensive spell utilizing ultrasonic waves on myself, Tomoe, and Lou. I was acting in an abundance of caution since I didn’t know how strong our opponents were. I opened the door of the carriage and jumped onto the roof.

“Wh-What?!” The guards were startled.

I spotted the enemy. “Enemies approaching from the front. You’re in the way. Move to the side!”

“Y-Yes!”

Saved by Tomoe’s decision not to kill them... Me, that is. Not the enemies. I hadn’t expected my life to be in danger on this job, so I hadn’t even considered the possibility that I would have to kill somebody. The reason A-rank requests and above were so lucrative was because they got your hands dirty. I’d been foolish to not prepare for that.

“Need my help?” asked Lou.

“Stand by.”

I used my right hand to invoke wind and lightning magic, and I dropped it right in front of the assailants as soon as they came within a hundred meters of the carriage.

Whoosh! Zap-zap-zap!

The cutting wind and strikes of lightning split open the earth. The people who had been struck fell deep into the rift along with their horses.

I looked into the crack. It was about twenty meters deep, with five men and their horses collapsed at the bottom.

“Your Majesty, shall we put them on trial in Judore or take them to Marsche?”

“...Try them under Judore’s laws.”

“Understood.”

I sent a magic transmission to the guild asking for them to take the bandits

and send information on the inner workings of Marsche. My transmission magic took the form of a light blue butterfly, out of respect for my beloved Enrique.

“You can even use magic, Serephone...”

“Women are made of secrets, you know.”

I changed our route to the capital multiple times after that, but every time, an assassin would come for us. I had no intention of showing off all of the techniques at my disposal, so I dropped them into the earth every time.

It was strange. Did Marsche have tracking magic? I hadn’t thought of it before now. I’d have to create it when I had the time.

I shot a glance at Princess Tomoe. I didn’t feel any trace of magic other than mine. But not just that... I didn’t feel any magic at all.

That aside...this meant there had to be a traitor among us. Who could it be, out of the two guards and the coachman?

And another thing, leaving enemy assassins and pawns alive would only create more potential danger in the future. Did Tomoe want me to spare them just because she was a kind princess?

“This is all too suspicious,” commented Lou.

“Yeah... What a pain.”

Eventually, near midnight, we reached a town that was only half a day’s ride away from the royal capital and took lodging. We had booked accommodations in all possible towns through the guild so we could rest without any problems.

We had separate rooms by gender, so Tomoe and I went into a small twin room. I smiled and said goodnight to the two guards—Sakaki, the older one who had slashed at me that morning, and Yamada, the younger one—before shutting the door. Sakaki and Yamada took turns staying awake to guard. The coachman had already gone to bed in preparation for the next day.

I cast soundproofing and perception-disruption magic on the room. A hot meal was laid out on the table.

I stopped Tomoe, who was gazing at the feast, and took a bite of the boiled

fish in the center. Yep, my grandmother's poison #3 was in it!

Clearing off the dishes from the table, I took out a dinner Matsuki had made for us this morning from my Magic Room (Perishables).

"All right, Your Majesty. Please enjoy."

"This is..."

On the menu for dinner was rice balls with pickled plums, chikuzenni, tamagoyaki omelets, and warabi-mochi for dessert.

"This is Marschean cuisine..."

When I told our chef Matsuki that I would be eating with someone from Marsche, he made a classic bento. He had finally stepped into the world of umami and fish broth...

As I chowed down, I said to Tomoe, "This is great!"

Tomoe gently picked up a rice ball, gave it a hesitant lick with the tip of her tongue, and chewed on a small bite. Then she chomped down on it, gobbling it up without a word. *This request covers meals. You can slow down and taste it.*

"That was delicious," said Tomoe, blushing. "Thank you."

"Of course it was. Matsuki made it," said Lou smugly.

"We have to leave early tomorrow, so we should go to bed."

"Um... Serephione, are you going to go anywhere tonight?"

"No, I plan to rest with you as long as I'm serving as your escort."

Lou would probably go out for a walk if he felt like it, though.

"Okay... That's good, then. Good night."

"Sleep well."

We set out at dawn the next day, heading straight for the capital while fending off similar attacks to the ones we faced the day before. If we were going to be attacked anyway, there was no point taking a detour. Some of the attackers could use magic, but I beat them down before they got a chance to

use it. Yay!

Finally, in the afternoon, we made it to the capital! Cue applause!

While I was happily showing my plate to the guards and heading through the entrance, a needle shot into my neck from behind. I turned around to see Yamada pointing a blowpipe at me and Sakaki taking out the city guards with strikes from the back of his sword.

So, all three members of her entourage were in on it! They did seem to work a little *too* well together. There was no sense of incompatibility between them. And this was the time they chose to take aim at me. I had let my guard down a bit in the moment. A film instantly formed over my eyes, and I sank to my knees.

The coachman began to drag Tomoe out of the carriage. She struggled, raising her voice. “Y-You all betrayed me! How awful! Ah! Serephione! You’re okay, aren’t you? Help me!”

“Poison #8... Bee venom...”

“This is Judore, you all realize! And Serephione is a noble lady! Do you understand what that means?!” she yelled.

The three Marschean men’s faces twisted in distress.

“It’s a serious crime to murder a noble lady!” she shouted. “They’ll capture you all in Judore and put you on trial. You’ll never be able to come back to Marsche again. Serves you right. He he! Oh, I hear footsteps already. The other guards are coming because they heard me yell! This is the gate to the royal capital. No matter how many you cut down, the soldiers will keep coming. It’s only a matter of time before you’re captured! Ha ha ha ha!”

“The people wouldn’t be in this position if you weren’t so greedy!” Yamada tried to swing at Tomoe, but Sakaki stopped him.

“You have a future. Don’t get your hands dirty. I’ll do it.” Sakaki swung his sword down.

“Sakaki!”

“Eeeek!”

“Ahhhh, okay, time to stop.”

I stepped in front of Tomoe and kicked Sakaki in the stomach.

“Agh!” Sakaki went flying into the wall.

“S-Serephione... How...?”

“Come on, I’m not dead! Don’t underestimate me!”

“B-But, the poison! It’s a lethal dose! From a Marre bee!” Yamada pointed at me incredulously.

“I’m used to it.”

I have frequent experience with it!

The footsteps we had heard before stopped, and the doors opened with a click.

“Sorry to keep you waiting—oh? Has the fight been resolved?”

“Soldiers! These men tried to kill a noble lady of the Granzeus family and me. Take them away right now! Wait, huh?”

The opposite of a soldier—Guildmaster Ziek, an old man always on the sidelines—stepped out.

He set up a place at the checkpoint station and sat Tomoe and the three men down.

I stood in front of them, intimidating them to the point of not being able to move. Ziek relaxedly sipped green tea next to me.

“So, Sakaki, Yamada, and the coachman... Ah, your name is Tabuchi? Could I ask you for an explanation from your point of view?”



“What are you doing, Serephione?! If you can move, then capture these traitors!”

“Shh, Tomoe! Be quiet!” I cast soundproofing magic on Tomoe. Her mouth continued to move without making any sound.

Yeah, I’m quietly angry, so? I jerked my chin at Sakaki for an explanation.

“I am Sakaki, commander of the 3rd Corps of the Marsche Army. I would like to apologize, first of all, for causing trouble to a noble lady who has nothing to do with our situation.”

Unbelievable... I glared at him silently.

“For the past several years, the mines have been running out of ore one after the next, and the kingdom’s power has declined. In spite of that, the royal family lives a life of luxury. The people have no rice balls to eat, but the princess dismissed the issue with ‘Then let them eat mochi.’”

I’ve definitely heard that somewhere before.

“The prime minister had enough of the situation and rose up. He wants to abolish the monarchy and make our kingdom a republic, putting politics in the hands of the people.”

So it’s the Riceball Revolution.

“I joined the prime minister’s cause while still registered in the army. I thought I could play an active role by virtue of being under the royal family’s umbrella.” Sakaki exhaled. “But it came back to bite me. It became known that I was on the prime minister’s side, and I was ordered to escort Princess Tomoe. It was a seemingly legitimate order. I couldn’t very well refuse.”

“But?”

“It’s completely made up that Tomoe is studying abroad. This was a plot to make us out as criminals for harming someone important from another country—the daughter of Judore’s Minister of Finance—and have us imprisoned abroad without Marschean royalty having to get their own hands dirty. I knew it was a plot, but I had to go along with it anyway. I couldn’t let Princess Tomoe escape into Judore.”

Of course. Even if she's the princess, she couldn't study at the magic academy with zero magic ability.

There would be nowhere for the people's anger to go if the princess who caused the decline of the country was allowed to easily go into exile. If she entered Judore as the princess of another country, she would be treated with respect as a guest of honor, receive strict security, and watch the civil war from upon high. If her relationship with the Judore royal family was good, she might even get reinforcements from Judore. Sakaki couldn't let her leave the country, that was for sure. However, if he killed a member of the royal family, it would make him just another bandit.

"Okay, next, Tomoe, tell me what you have to say!" I released the soundproofing magic.

"Pfft! You people just say whatever you want if we listen quietly! I'll acknowledge that the country's economy has been struggling, and we have some things to reflect on... But that doesn't make it okay to start a revolt and poison my older brother and serving ladies!"

"Your bad policies and extravagance have starved millions of our people to death!" Yamada's voice was rough.

"Th-The royal family has to maintain our dignity and pride as royalty."

"Tch, what worthless pride. The whole lot of you are useless!" shot back Yamada.

Tomoe shot me a glare. "Serephione, you must have known these men were against us. Why didn't you take them out last night while they were sleeping?! That would have been enough!"

"Well, my job description was just to escort you."

"I can't believe you!"

"Basically, Your Majesty, you were okay with having me killed and these men captured if it meant you could rest in Judore as your safe haven. And Sakaki, you knew about her plot, but you were fine with it as long as somebody who wasn't guilty of killing me captured the princess and brought her back to Marsche. Either way, you would have known that you would get me, a noble

lady, if you specified that you wanted a woman of A-rank or higher on short notice. You really underestimated a gold-rank adventurer.”

“Sorry...” Sakaki hung his head.

“And what’s wrong with that? It’s your decision to put yourself in danger as an adventurer!” retorted Tomoe.

“Oh my... He he, nothing’s wrong with it; it’s just against the rules.”

“Rules?”

“Yes. Let me take you through this step by step. My job here is done, right? I brought the four of you safely to Judore.”

“N-No, it’s not done! You failed the mission!”

“Hey... Are you trying to make a fool out of my guild member?” Ziek the demon had been summoned. But Tomoe seemed unintimidated by an elder who had orders of magnitude more experience than her.

“W-Well, the job was to take me to the magic academy! I’ll just go back to Marsche from here. You failed your job. My apologies.”

“All right, let’s look at the latest version of the contract from yesterday. It says ‘to the gates of the capital.’ My mission is complete. The fee will be three million gold. Thanks for your business!”

“N-Nonsense!”

“You also deliberately put an adventurer in danger. It was attempted murder, after all! That means a fine. I’m a valuable A-rank female adventurer, so the fine is twenty million gold. The total comes to twenty-three million gold. Please get the money together and pay as soon as possible!”

“This isn’t a game! I can’t agree to this! I’m not paying you a dime!”

“So you intend to evade the bill?”

“Of course! I’m the head of my country! The Kingdom of Marsche wants these bandits done away with. I won’t let a guild order me around, and I don’t need to pay you either! You should be happy to help me!”

“Guilds are country-independent organizations. We have no need to cater to

Marsche in particular. If you just paid the money now, our contract would be fulfilled, and we wouldn't interfere with you in the future, for better or for worse."

"I knew you were a noble lady, but...you're so shallow, with all this talk of money..."

"Sorry I'm shallow. Anyway, does this mean your country is defaulting on the official contract you made with the guild despite the terms being fulfilled?"

"I am Tomoe, the princess of Marsche! Don't ask me the same question again, you insolent girl!"

"Got it!" I turned to Ziek, took a large stack of letters from him, and tossed them into the air with a spell activated in my right hand.

The letters instantly turned into hundreds of red butterflies and flew out the window.

"No!" Tabuchi the coachman stood up and raised his voice for the first time.

"Wh-What are these butterflies?!" Tomoe asked as she watched the ominous scene.

"It's transmission magic. Even Magicless people can read the emergency red kind. They've been sent out to every guild in the world. No guild or adventurer will ever deal with Marsche again...or forgive you."

"How can this be...?" Sakaki covered his face with his hands.

"You...! Do you, as a proud member of the royal family, not understand how much adventurers do to bring wealth to our kingdom and keep the economy running?! Do you not understand that it's adventurers that protect our public order?! You've made enemies of all the guilds! Marsche... Marsche has no more hope! Waaah..." Yamada broke down in tears.

"...Huh?"

"Your Majesty, you have broken a long-standing pact between your kingdom and this guild," I declared. "Guildmaster, can I leave the rest up to you?"

"I will take responsibility for the rest," Ziek replied. "Even though you don't like to take on work that makes you stand out, you took this job for the sake of

the guild... I apologize that you had to take part in this worthless drama. In the future, I will make sure that even emergency requests are carefully examined.”

I left the checkpoint station.

“Sere... Looks like we’re not getting paid this time.”

Don’t say that. You’ll make me cry. Sniff.



When I went back to my dorm after class, I received a request for a visit. I went to the common room, which was open and well monitored, to find the people who I’d done free work for just a few days ago—Sakaki and his group.

“You...really are a normal knight school student,” said Yamada bashfully, his face flushed.

I sighed. “What is it? Are you here to settle the score?”

“No. I wanted to come and apologize once more before I go back to my home kingdom. I’m terribly sorry for wrapping you up in our mess.” Sakaki stepped forward as a representative and lowered his head.

Unbelievable.

“And...I’ll never forget my debt to you.”

“Debt? I don’t remember helping you out at any point,” I replied. “Shouldn’t you have a grudge against me, if anything, since the guilds wouldn’t be against you if not for me?”

“What you did was unfortunate for us, but it was all proper. I may grieve what happened, but I hold no resentment toward you.”

Hmm...

“You could have killed me and my allies in a second on the road, but you let us go.”

“That’s what I was asked to do.”

“You gave us the chance to tell our side of the story instead of only listening to the princess.”

"I try not to take royalty at their word uncritically. I especially hate royalty that tries to get away with things without getting their hands dirty."

"Now that it has been deserted by the guilds, Marsche will soon collapse. Someday, when the revolution is over, I will repay my debt to you."

"Just pay me the money you owe me!"

As I saw them off at the school gates, I decided to offer them some advice. "I'm going to warn you out of consideration... In my experience, the difficult part of a revolution comes when it's over. Some revolutionaries find themselves having to become ruthless dictators in order to keep chaos at bay, but then they forget their original cause and are killed themselves. Are you prepared for that?"

I learned that in world history class in my past life!

Surprise ran through Sakaki's eyes, and something like fear through Tabuchi's. Their eyes darted around the vicinity as they looked at me with serious expressions.

"Consideration, you say... You are frightening, Twilight Lady of Destruction. We will keep that in mind. I hope to see you again someday. When we meet again, I hope you will let us apologize again for our rudeness and atone for our sins," said Tabuchi, the oldest of the three, who had been standing in the back. The three bowed their heads deeply and left on horseback.

"You're collecting a lot of variations on your nickname, Sere," muttered Lou from atop my head.

Lady of Destruction... Is that because I've finally destroyed a country? That's pretty wild...

"I'm beat. Could you give me a cake, Lou? I feel like something sweet."

"Well... I suppose I can give you the fourth one."

...I'd better negotiate a salary raise for Matsuki with papa when I get home. It's spring, after all.



"All right! Time to go hunt that wild junk bear!"

“J-Junk bear?!”

Nick’s win-loss ratio hadn’t been very good at school recently. It wasn’t that he was getting lazy. His weapon was just bad.

His sword was all beat up, just like when he fought me in the entrance exam. Knight school had some wealthy students, so no matter how much skill Nick had, he couldn’t win against the best swords money could buy.

He had been making some money from guild commissions, but apparently he’d been sending it all to his family. I had a plan to buy him a new sword without hurting his pride, though.

“I’m going to have my good friend Nick here accompany me on an A-rank commission so he can level up some more,” I explained to Lara as I handed her the commission form. “Apparently, there’s a stray junk bear devouring the rabbits and deer in Trundle territory.”

The reward for an A-rank commission was four times as much as Nick’s D-rank. Even after we split it, he would get twice as much as usual. He could take that straight to the weapons shop.

“Good luck, Nick! I’ll be doing some collection jobs in this area while I wait for you to get back,” said Alma. “I’d like this E-rank one, Ms. Lara!”

While Alma spoke with Lara, I gave her a wave and took Nick outside with me. As we headed to the forest—“we” including Lou, who was riding on my shoulder—I explained to Nick our plan for today.

“But even Mr. Kodak needs a whole day to take down a junk bear. Do we have to do it today?”

“Of course. It’s damaging the forest. The faster we take it down, the less damage it can cause! Oh, I spy footprints! It must be around here... One second.”

Fwee! I blew on a whistle briefly.

A few seconds later, a silver snake appeared—it was Miyu, who was now almost a meter long.

“A sn-snake!”

“Hiya, Miyu! Which way is the junk bear?” I asked.

“Good to see you again, Lou. Miss Sere, the bear is tormenting a weasel about five minutes south of here.”

“Thanks! Take this in return. Share it with your papa.” I handed her a snakeberry tart, her favorite, wrapped in cloth.

“Thank you, Miss Sere! Call me anytime! Good day, Lou.”

“Mhm,” responded Lou.

Miyu hung the cloth around her neck and slithered off into the forest.

I turned around to Nick. “You heard what she said.”

“I did not! How are you talking to snakes like it’s nothing, Serephi?!”

“Heh... You’ll understand once you have enough experience...” I gazed into the distance, remembering that fateful day when I met Miyu.

“Really? You can talk to snakes once you reach A-rank? No, that can’t be right...”

“All right, I’m all ready! Let’s dash, Nick! Don’t make a sound!”

I grabbed the zoned-out Nick by the scruff of his neck and started to run.

“Ahhhh!”

“Target spotted! I’ll attack it from above and blind it, so you restrain its feet! Split up!”

“Wait! I don’t see the target yet!”

Whoa, this is the biggest junk bear I’ve ever seen. It’s at least three meters long. And I can’t use magic with Nick here...

“You can use magic as long as he doesn’t notice, right?” pointed out Lou.

“True!”

I walked around to the front of the junk bear and used both my hands to throw two shurikens, which I had strengthened and coated with poison, with all my might.

Take this! The shurikens went right through its eyes and stuck into the tree

behind the bear.

Awesome, I destroyed its brain!

...Wait, what?

The bear struggled despite its loss of sight, then somehow jumped straight in Nick's direction!

Oh, it's because Lou is on my head... As an animal, of course it would instinctively go for the weaker enemy...

"Nick! Sorry! It's headed your way!"

"Whoa!"

Nick jumped out of the way by a hair's breadth, dodging the bear's sharp claws. *Phew, that's a relief!*

"That is *not* a relief!" he shouted.

The junk bear started to move again, for some reason. It chased after Nick with a desperate look on its face.

"So stubborn," commented Lou.

"Who is?"

"Both of you."

"Nick, I think we have to stab it in the heart! Go for it from the front!"

"Me?!"

Of course. This would mean nothing if Nick didn't deliver the killing blow.

Nick stopped in his tracks, ready to go. Then he ducked under the bear's legs!

Now! I fired a lightning bolt at the junk bear from Nick's blind spot, and it stopped moving for a moment! Nick wouldn't let that moment go to waste, of course.

Slash! Nick stabbed his long-trusted sword into the bear's heart.

"Ms. Lara, Alma! We're back!"

“Hey there! I wasn’t worried about you one bit!” Alma waved to us as she played cards with Matt.

“Welcome back. Hm? Nick, you look exhausted.”

While Lara was giving Nick some revitalizing medication, I took the freshly-killed junk bear out of my Magic Room.

“You brought in another big one,” said Ziek as he came out from the back.

“Nick... Don’t tell me Serephione took you out to hunt this without a thorough explanation?”

“G-Guildmaster...”

Nick cried into Ziek’s chest. *Nick, you’re already close with the guildmaster?*

“All right, thank you for completing this A-rank hunting mission! The pay was two hundred thousand gold, but you brought back a large one, so I’ll add a bonus of thirty thousand gold to make it two hundred and thirty thousand! How would you like to split it?” asked Lara.

“Nick can have a hundred and fifty thousand, and I’ll take the other eighty thousand.”

“Hey, what are you doing?” Nick’s eyes were wide.

“Of course the one who made the finishing blow should get twice as much!”

“But...”

“Serephione, could I buy this jumbo junk bear off of you?” asked Lara.

“Yes, that’s why I brought it. But, let’s see... Could you give the fangs and paw pads to Nick?”

“Why?” asked Nick perplexedly.

“Men wear the fangs as commemorative accessories. Kodak will be happy if you show him. And the paw pads are a delicacy, so you can give them to your family as a thank-you gift for everything they’ve done for you.”

“Serephi...”

“I see... I thought you were being reckless, but you had an ulterior motive.”

Ziek was suddenly smiling. “The blood and claws will go to Nick as well, I assume?”

Huh? What do you mean?

“The blood of junk bears contains high-quality iron,” Ziek explained. “If you soak a sword in it overnight, then sharpen it using the claws, any old sword will become as sharp as a prized royal sword.” Ziek glanced at Nick’s sword in its sheath.

“Is that why you did all this...? For me?”

“Well, I wouldn’t say that...”

“How thoughtful of you, Serephi...” Alma’s eyes were sparkling.

“Of course our lady wouldn’t acknowledge it. She’s too modest!”

No, Matt! I legitimately didn’t know!

“All right, the purchase is complete. It comes out to 486,337 gold, since the fur and leather are high quality. What a lucky catch. You’ll give the money to Nick as well, Serephi? How chivalrous of you!”

What?! We should split the money! I need cash for my future escape plan!

“You should gratefully accept your senior’s kind gesture. You can repay your debt someday by paying it forward to a junior.”

Ziek! Don’t just wrap it up cleanly!

“Serephi... Thank you...” Nick clutched the unusually large payment and bit his lip, tears coming to his eyes. Alma was crying too just watching!

“So, we’re not getting paid again...” said Lou. “Don’t worry about it, Sere...”

I smiled through the tears in my eyes... I had no choice but to smile!



After that, Nick took us to his home in the artisan district of the capital’s downtown area because he didn’t know how to cook bear paw.

Lou had gone back to the Granzeus mansion for his day off to see his beloved Matsuki.

When Nick opened the front door, hot air came out from inside.

“I’m back! Duncan, Tom! I brought friends!”

“Hey there! Don’t just chat in the doorway, come on in!” A deep, throaty voice sounded from inside. We made our way into the workshop.

“This guy with the huge beard is my foster dad, Duncan. Duncan, this is Serephi, and this is Alma. They may be cute, but they’re stronger than tropical monitor lizards!”

“Nice to meet you, Duncan. I’m Nick’s classmate, Serephi.”

“My name is Alma. Thank you for having us over on such short notice.”

Duncan was in his work clothes, dripping sweat with a towel wrapped around his head. He was the picture of a hardworking artisan.

“Hey, young ladies! Thanks for being good friends to Nick! Oh, you’re making dinner? Out of junk bear paws? That’s great!”

Duncan was a glass blower by trade. He had been a senior apprentice of Nick’s father. When Nick’s parents passed away from an epidemic, Duncan took in Nick as a matter of course.

Blown glass didn’t sell in large quantities, so their lifestyle wasn’t very easy. Nonetheless, Duncan was willing to consider Nick his apprentice and raise him as such—as Duncan put it, Nick already had good parents, so he couldn’t be a father to him. Early on, however, he realized Nick wasn’t great with handiwork, so he gave up on making Nick his successor with a laugh and put him in the role of housekeeper instead. He also didn’t stand in the way of Nick’s dream of becoming a knight when he found out later.

“I mean, this kid can’t make hollow glass no matter how much he blows. No cups or flower vases in his future! Ga ha ha!”

The glass-blowing studio currently housed Duncan and Tom, who was the senior apprentice that would inherit the place in the future. Nick’s small room was still there, of course.

“Why don’t you two try your hand at painting?” Nick suggested. “We still have time before closing!”

Nick had a tray with two clear glasses on it. Excited for my first time experiencing this, I picked the short whiskey glass. Alma took the tall and thin glass.

“Master, I want to use blue-green paint,” I said to Nick.

“Oh, like your dad’s eyes? Let’s see... Just mix this and this together.”

“I think I’ll go with green too,” Alma said.

“If you make it a gradient with a caramel color matching your eyes, the beer will look better inside it.”

“How do I make a gradient?”

“Well, you take this, and...”

“That’s so cool, Nick! I had no idea you were good at this!”

“Master Nick! I want to use this light green to remind people of the wheat fields in my domain!”

“All right, so take two brushes and cross them like this... How about that?”

“Awesome! Nick, you’re actually great at this! What if you went back to being a glassmaker?”

“Are you just saying I’m not knight material?”

“Don’t say that, young lady!” chimed in Duncan. “These wouldn’t sell. You’ll just have to look after him as a knight!”

“Why’d you have to say it like that?!” exclaimed Nick.

Duncan laughed. “Get those hands moving! You’ll run out of time to fire it!”

Alma and I finished painting with Nick’s help. Then we asked Tom, the smiling, chubby guy, to fire the glass for us.

“Okay, Nick, show us to the kitchen!”

We took the fur out of the paw pads as Lara had shown us, roasted them in the oven until they were crispy, and then simmered them in red wine and honey. In the meantime, we decided to make a few side dishes with the

ingredients available in the kitchen.

While we were chopping onions, Alma murmured something to me. “I thought male craftsmen would be scarier. I didn’t think the three of us would get together and be friendly...”

“They’re Nick’s family. Of course they’re nice!”

“You’re right.”

Alma had been raised in a patriarchal environment, so she was extremely wary of adult men. She was like a shy kitten. I hoped she would find more and more people she could trust.

We figured since Nick and his family usually just grilled things with salt and pepper, our cooking would be a hit so long as we prepared something with just a little bit of effort. What I ended up making was a sort of carpaccio out of a tuna-like fish and something resembling teriyaki chicken with something that seemed similar to soy sauce. Alma made a cold pasta full of a tomato-ish vegetable, chili peppers, and carrots. We served our side dishes along with the simmered bear paw in glassware made by Duncan.

“How refreshing! Well, the bear looks pretty rich, though.”

“Serephi, my simple cooking looks like it’s from a high-class restaurant!” exclaimed Alma. “The plates make such a difference.”

“Looks great, you two!”

“Come on, Duncan, Tom! Enjoy some Trundle bear!”

“I can’t believe we get to eat a junk bear that Nick hunted! Thanks for the meal, young ladies!”

“Time to dig in!”

“Yum! I didn’t know bear meat could get so tender. I feel invincible now that I’ve eaten this! I’m impressed that you made such a luxurious dish in our tiny kitchen!”

My eyes met Alma’s, and we smiled. If they thought it was luxurious, then we wouldn’t correct their misunderstanding. All this had been a piece of cake to make thanks to the easy-to-understand recipes Matsuki gave us.

"Is it okay to eat fish raw?" Tom asked.

"I understand if you'd rather not, Tom. You don't have to force yourself to eat it."

"Nah, I'll eat it. I'm definitely not letting Duncan or Nick have my portion!"

Then why did you ask?!

"Ahh, I wish she could have tasted this delicious cooking..." mused Duncan.

"Is 'she' your wife? Did she pass away?"

"Oh, I'm just fantasizing out loud."

"Right... Hey, Alma, we should eat too."

"O-Okay."

"Serephi's a big eater, so I can see how she's a good cook, but you're great at cooking too, Alma! Thanks!" complimented Nick.

"I-It's because of the glassware Duncan made!" stammered Alma. "Right, Serephi?" She was blushing.

"No way! It's because of the love you put into it!" I responded.

"What...?! S-Serephi, you put love into it too!"

"So it's full of love." Tom grinned.

"This is the best day of my life... Your son brought home two kind, righteous friends..." muttered Duncan quietly to the blank ceiling.

After we'd cleaned our plates, Nick, the housekeeper, expertly cleared the table. And before long, our glasses were done firing.

"Wow!"

"Serephi... This is better than I even imagined!"

I'd made a one-of-a-kind glass! Would my papa drink whiskey from it? I pictured him being happy to receive it and felt my spirits rise.

"Thank you for the cup! Should we get back to the dorms, Nick?"

“W-Wait!”

“Nick?”

“Here... Take these...”

He handed us each a round, flat piece of glass about three centimeters in diameter. The glass was light blue, and mine had a flowing pattern of silver specks, while Alma’s had gold specks. Little air bubbles danced inside the glass pieces.

It was...gold and silver dust!

Nick scratched his head. “I have some ideas of my own, as long as they don’t involve cups.”

“Nick...”

“Shut up and just take them.”

“Why?”

“It’s, you know...thanks for everything! And you guys have seemed down lately, what with Elise and Sasara graduating...”

How do you have such good taste, Nick?

The pieces of glass were too light to use as paperweights but too heavy to wear on a chain as a necklace. They were like marbles from my past life, but bigger. They had no purpose, but they were filled with Nick’s feelings.

“So pretty...”

It was a handmade gift. I was moved. Nick was a better friend than I deserved.

I would keep this piece of glass in my pocket until I was old and gray. I could take it out from time to time, hold it up to the light, and think back on the happy days I spent with Nick and Alma.

Tears came to Alma’s eyes as well.

“Thank you, Nick... I love it!” Alma crashed into Nick and started crying into his chest.

“A-Alma!” Nick gently put a hand on Alma’s back.

“All I ever do...is cause you trouble...but you gave me this lovely present...!”
cried Alma.

“Alma... You and I are Serephi’s inseparable troublemakers, aren’t we?”

“Yeah... Wait, hey!”

“Ah, to be young...” Tom mused as he looked on.

Tom, you’re on the same wavelength as some fluffballs I know...!

“Maybe I’ll have grandchildren after all... I wish you could be here to see them...” Duncan’s fantasy had entered a new chapter.

Intermission: Boys' Night!

Serephione was fast asleep in her dorm room at midnight. Lou, who had been snoozing away on her chest, woke up to the sound of footsteps outside and looked out the window.

"They're having another meeting? They never learn..." he muttered. Then he cast illusion magic on himself, leapt out of the window without a sound, and followed the boys as they ran into the lecture hall.

The boys chattered excitedly.

"Silence, everyone...! Now, let us begin the twenty-third 'Grateful to Be Alive at the Same Time as Serephione and Alma Club' meeting!"

Applause sounded, followed by a couple blows of a whistle.

"I, Everest from Year 2, Class 1, will be your moderator today. Let me take attendance quickly... I see all 198 of you are here. Oh, Dan, weren't you absent from class today with a sudden fever? Are you okay to be out of bed?"

"I couldn't just stay in bed knowing there's a Sere-Alma club meeting..." said Dan through coughs and wheezes.

"Admirable resolve. This group was founded thanks to our female classmates Serephione and Alma using their unparalleled strength to knock sense into those of us who had held prejudice against them. Having been KO'd by their flawless beauty, we now wish to pay tribute to them in sunshine, in shadow, and for our whole lifetimes. Amazingly, our club has gained more and more supporters, and we now have members from every year! Oh, we don't have much time, so let's move on to the discussion. Our first topic was proposed by a fourth-year: 'Shouldn't students in any year be allowed to participate in the second-year's long-distance swimming event?' Representative, please take the stage."

"Thank you. The second year class has a long-standing tradition of swimming

from the beach behind the school to Lunlun Island. Those of us who have experienced it personally know that swimming ten kilometers both ways is extremely difficult. We cannot let anything happen to our treasures, Serephone and Alma! I wish to swim alongside them as support.”

“You’re right, it is very hard. It’s dangerous after sunset too. The third years agree unanimously!”

“Hey, you guys have ulterior motives! You just want to see Sere-Alma in swimsuits!”

“No, it doubles as an escape drill, so they’ll be swimming in their clothes, not in swimsuits.”

“If their uniforms get wet...they’ll be see-through...”

“Hey! A first year just passed out with a nosebleed! Get the relief squad!”

“Over here too!”

“If the first years are going to cause issues, they should just leave!”

“B-But, this is the only reason I enrolled...! Waaah!”

“...”

“A-Anyway, we should protect Sere-Alma with our lives as their classmates! We don’t need any help from other years.”

“You haven’t even swam before! What can you do?!”

“Say that again!”

“Ugh, you’re making such a racket.”

“Mr. Kodak!”

“The long-distance swim will be second-years only, as usual,” asserted Kodak.

“H-How could you just crush our dreams like that...?”

“There will be one modification, however,” Kodak explained. “Erza Trundle, head of the notorious Women in Knight School Committee, has proposed that boys swim with blindfolds on for their own progress. Her proposal has been accepted as a school rule.”

“Wh-What?!” exclaimed a chorus of boys.

“Lunlun Island, with a blindfold...”

“Aren’t there sharks around here...?”

“Y-Yes, sir! This proposal shall be withdrawn effective immediately!”

“O-Okay... This proposal has been rejected. On to the next topic. This is a proposal from a first year: ‘I would like to escort Sere-Alma to the first-years’ folk dance event at the school festival!’ Representative, take the stage!”

“I...! They...! I...!”

“...Let’s move on to the free discussion section then. Raise your hand if you have anything to say! Yes, Kent from Year 2, Class 2?”

“I saw Nick leaving on a horse with Serephione the other day. Where did you two go? Could it be that you’re dating?”

“What?! What are you doing sneaking out, Nick?! And I thought you were on Team Alma!”

“Silence! Nick, your statement? And tell the whole truth.”

“A horse? I guess that was probably for Serephi’s qualification test. I went to watch ’cause I figured I could learn from her. That’s it.”

“Did Serephione...advance a rank?”

“Yep, she’s a gold ranker. She used a forbidden technique to win against an S-ranker...”

“An A-ranker at Trundle...”

“She’s becoming an unreachable goddess...”

“Nick! Why didn’t you report this vital information to us?!”

“I mean, she hates that kind of thing. Showing off her status, or strength, or good deeds and stuff.”

“I see...”

“That’s the Twilight Goddess for you...”

“She must be the fairy of the demon lord...”

Another boy raised his hand. “I have information about someone the complete opposite of that, an arrogant guy who’s been bullying Alma!”

“What?!”

“Not our calm and powerful Alma!”

“Silence! Go on, Light from Year 2, Class 1.”

“An acquaintance of mine used to be a maid at Cecil’s house, and when I asked her about it, she told me that the whole family neglected Alma. They didn’t give her any education or dresses or weapons despite being a noble family. She only got Cecil’s hand-me-downs. She was always crying in her bed, but the servants had to ignore it because they would be fired if they tried to comfort her.”

“Huh?! That’s terrible!”

“Cecil! Explain this!”

“Well, Alma was a girl, and we were her older brothers, so—”

“Are you dumb? We know you’re boys and she’s a girl. Why does being a girl have to mean she gets looked down on? Didn’t you ever think to help your little sister who was being bullied?”

“I mean, my family believed girls are weak—”

“If they’re weak, then they deserve protection even more!”

“I bet they didn’t even let her go to the queen’s tea party for all the ten-year-old noble ladies! So mean!”

“Girls are weak? You can’t say that while being weaker than Alma!”

“So that’s why Alma seems a bit gloomy...”

“I even heard that the marquis slapped Alma across the face once because Cecil lied!”

Shock ran through the room.

“Cecil! Step forward!”

“I didn’t know that would happen when I said it! I regret it now too! She got

so cute as soon as she entered school, and it made me think about what I'd done in the past... If it made Alma feel better, I would prostrate myself to her and let her step on me and kick me... Serephione too..."

Everyone fell silent.

"U-Um, Alma is...getting prettier and prettier, isn't she? I feel like crying whenever I see how she's softened up a bit and started smiling more recently!"

"That's thanks to Serephione. Their matching outfits on days off are agonizingly cute!"

"When I saw all four girls come to get breakfast in their pajamas at the end of last year, I praised God for the first time in my life!"

"Hey... Let me ask one thing."

"Yes, go ahead, Mr. Kodak."

"What's the second rule of knight school?"

"Knights shall cherish, respect, and protect those weaker than themselves!" the boys said in chorus.

"Exactly. Do you understand, Cecil?"

"Yes, sir..."

"Thank you, Mr. Kodak. Next speaker, please."

"Okay!"

"You're a first-year, right? I don't know everybody's names yet, so please give your name and your statement."

"I-I'm Silk from Year 1, Class 2. So, I have this older sister—not blood-related, though—and she asked me to write to her about school in detail, so I told her about this club, and she said she wants to come to the next meeting... Can I invite her?"

The room broke out into a commotion.

"S-Silk, you know this club is a secret from everyone outside our school! Why did you let an outsider know?!"

“I-I’m sorry! She’s just done so much for me, so I couldn’t refuse her! And I thought she might be involved with Sere-Alma someday, so that would make it okay... Waaaah!”

“D-Don’t cry! The first-years this year are a bunch of crybabies... I thought you were supposed to be a bunch of experts, since there were three times as many applicants as usual. This is a problem, though...”

“Oh, give it a break, you kids.”

“Mr. Kodak!”

“Okay, so who’s this older sister of yours?”

“Second Lieutenant Sasara with the National Intelligence Department,” Silk sniffled.

A shock ran through the room.

“It’s Sasara!”

“You’re Sasara’s little brother?!”

“I was raised in the same orphanage as her. We all love her as our big sister. Both when she went to school and now, she always visits the orphanage when she has time, sends presents, and plays with the little ones.”

“How noble...”

“What a beautiful family... I wish I could be a part of it...”

“Silence, everyone! What exactly does Sasara want to know about, Silk?”

“Well, she’s really worried about Serephione since she seemed down when she saw her the other day...”

“She did?! Nick! Tell us the whole truth if you have any idea what’s wrong!”

“Oh, she took a guild request recently, but they stiffed her on the payment...so she’s probably down about that.”

“They betrayed our Serephione!”

“It can’t be!”

“Nick, tell us who’s responsible for this!”

“Well, it’s not really a secret. It was the princess of Marsche.”

“Marsche... My dad is a businessman, so I’ll tell him to stop doing business with them.”

“My father is a viscount who owns a shipping company, so I’ll advise him to change the usual routes.”

“We have to help Serephione’s emotional wound more than anything! Let’s all fold paper cranes for her!”

“Paper cranes?! She’s not sick! We should fold her some paper samurai!”

“Samurai...?”

“Silence, everybody! Of course Sasara isn’t an outsider to us, Silk. It would be a dream come true if she attended a meeting...an unexpected blessing! Please let me know what day works for her and we will make every effort to welcome her. Any objections?”

“No objection!” everybody replied.

“Um, can I speak?”

“Oh, Murdock from Year 2, Class 2! How unusual. Go ahead!”

“S-So, I’m a member of the art club, and we made a picture book called ‘The Four Knight Sisters.’ The oldest is the strong Elise, the second is the cheerful Sasara, the third is the calm Alma, and the fourth is the wild Serephione. They resolve difficult cases. The pictures are by a fourth-year who’s a promising painter, Nelson. Please let me know if you’re interested.”

“Hey... I have one question.”

“Yes, Mr. Kodak?”

“...How much does it cost?”

“Five hundred gold.”

“Sold!”

“No fair, Mr. Kodak! I want one too!”

“I’ll take two! One to read and one for my collection!”

The boys chattered excitedly.

“Too peaceful...” Lou knit his eyebrows.

Chapter 3: The Summons

On an afternoon with a humid early summer breeze, a familiar paper airplane appeared in front of me.

“Come to the gym after school.”

It had been a while since my last summons like this.

“Long time no see, Serephone! Are you doing well? How’s your second year going? Is your family doing well back in their domain?”

“It’s good to see you again, General Avenger. I miss my friends who graduated, but I’m doing well other than that. I’m enjoying the history of war and tactics classes that I started in my second year. My grandmother is taking care of her official duties in Trundle territory.”

“I see... Good to hear.” As I’d thought, the last part was the only thing he wanted to hear.

General Avenger was in his summer military uniform. Medals and aglets hung heavily from his neck and shoulders. *Is he coming back from some official ceremony? What could he want with me when he seems so busy?*

“Sorry for not contacting you very often. It took a lot of work, but now that I know that the magical knight idea I had is already in use, I was thinking about how to use it in a real war setting.”

“Okay.”

“Anybody with both magic and fighting ability can obtain the skill with practice, but you don’t often find people with that much talent. If it were to be put into practice, we would pair each soldier with a magician and have the magician cast magic on the soldier’s weapon, but...the national magician’s association didn’t agree to that... Ha ha ha.”

“Um, couldn’t you hire mercenaries who can use magic from guilds?”

“I would get opponents asking why I hire outside magicians even though we have a magician’s association. It’s also very expensive to hire mercenaries at a high enough rank that they can use magic on weapons...”

“I see...”

“But don’t be so discouraged, Serephione. There was one person who listened to me seriously at the meeting and offered to help me.”

“Okay...”

“I thought about your future as well, Serephione. I wanted to raise you as a magical knight, but no, you have abilities beyond my reach. As an educator, I have a duty to help you grow to your fullest potential.”

Huh?

“I asked him to be your teacher, and he happily agreed.”

What. Are. You. Talking. About?

“Good news, Serephione! Prince Schneider is your new teacher!”

The door to the gym opened, and the prince entered along with the light from outside. He was overwhelmingly intimidating. His royal blond hair was trimmed beautifully at his jawline, and his gray eyes shone happily. He wore a white robe instead of the trademark black robe of magicians, perhaps because he was a prince. Between the white roses scattered across his chest and his magical aura, he looked truly godlike.

“You flatter me too much, General.”

I took my knives from the holsters on each of my thighs, jumped back as far as I could, and readied my hands.

“S-Serephione...?” General Avenger’s eyes went wide as I suddenly took out my weapon.

“Lady Granzeus... Would it be fair to say it’s been a long time?”

He knew everything after all. He was just letting me think he didn’t.

“He’s finally here...” Lou got down from my shoulder, instantly recognizing the prince’s ability, and returned the intimidating look to back me up.

“The Heavenly Beast of the West is just as beautiful as he was back then.”

I was speechless. He could see Lou, even with all the illusion magic we’d cast.

“Don’t glare at me like that. I’m grateful to you two. You changed my fate when I met you that day.”

“Sere, we have to run!” said Lou. We ran for the window and jumped. Just then, razor-sharp bullets of ice flew at us. I deflected them with my knife. Lou grew to his full size and smashed the window with his thick tail.

“Serephione! You can’t pull a knife on the prince! That’s disrespectful!” General Avenger drew his sword and slashed at me. *Damn it! Do I have no choice but to fight them?*

Just as I swung my right hand despite my hesitation, somebody came between me and the general.

Clang!

“Kodak!” He deflected the general’s sword!

“The prince obviously started the fight, General!”

“It’s not a matter of who started it! Attacking a member of the royal family is a grave insult!”

“Ahh, but the original reason we’re in this situation is because you broke your word. You swore an oath to Lady Erza. You promised not to tell anyone about our lady’s abilities!”

“Nonsense! I had no need to keep secrets from the royal family!”

To the general—to any upright soldier—the kingdom equaled the royal family. Their life’s purpose was to protect the royal family, and that came before even the most serious of promises. A person like him could never imagine the royal family as enemies.

I’d been foolish. I’d thought that someone as upstanding as General Avenger would never betray me, but he unknowingly betrayed me because of that very uprightness.

“It is the collective will of the Trundles, Granzeuses, and beings of even loftier

heights that Serephione should enjoy a healthy adolescence while having her abilities be kept secret. We all agree that the most harmful outcome for her would be if the royal family were to find out about her abilities and try to use her.”

“Harmful, huh? What a strange way to put it,” said the prince with a smirk.

“How dare you give the prince such an insolent answer!” barked the general.

“Sorry, but for me, it’s all about strength and the Trundle way of life, which is based on equality. My duty is to protect Lady Erza and Serephione with my life. Miss! Run!”

“Kodak!”

“Run!”

Lou jumped out of the window, and I started running to follow him.

“Chase them!” As the prince’s order echoed through the gym, I jumped out of the window after Lou.

“Serephi!”

I saw Nick and Alma! They were waving at me frantically, not knowing what was going on!

I clutched my treasured glass ball in my pocket. *Ah...* A tear trailed down my cheek. I mouthed “goodbye” to them as I picked up speed, cloaked in wind.

Goodbye, knight school. Goodbye to the place I longed for since I was three years old, my only salvation.

“To the west! My territory is there!”

“Got it!”

Lou and I used body-strengthening magic and kept running. I used shurikens to take down the skilled pursuers that Prince Schneider sent after me, but a huge magical force was approaching at impossible speed.

“Sorry, Lou. They’re going to catch up to us in a few minutes.”

“Not your fault. Let’s head for the desert just beyond this forest!”

As I ran toward the desert on the border, I exchanged my armor with a suit I had in my Magic Room.

Lou and I stood with the sun to our backs, imitating Nick. Prince Schneider stood about fifty meters away. His hair, robe, and the white roses on his chest were all intact, and he seemed to have no intention of hiding his magical power, which was strong enough to control the earth itself. It was about three times as strong as mine. Had I not put in enough effort?

“Sere, don’t let it weigh on you. It’s just a difference of age and height. You’ll grow more.”

“It doesn’t matter if I’ll grow more later. I’m in trouble right now.”

“You’re right about that.”

The wind carried the prince’s cool voice to me. “I’m glad you’ve stopped this game of cat and mouse. I just want to talk to you.”

“That attack before would have done more than hurt me, though.”

“You were running away.”

“I have a pact to hide my heavenly beast.”

“Contracts are so difficult.”

“What are you talking about?”

“It’s simple. I want you on my side. That’s all.”

The only people who’re using their power to support me right now are my family, Lou...and Gillain. “I thought all the people of the kingdom respected you?”

“That’s not true.”

“I’m just a knight trainee. I don’t know how to socialize, and I don’t have the high-level skills to tell what you’re thinking.”

“I want you to lend me a hand in the war that is coming soon.”

“With what country?” *Is it Galé? Will we have a war with them like in the book? Gillain didn’t say anything last time I saw him. Are we going to declare war on them? Will I end up on the front lines again? Will I have to fight Gillain?*

“Not Galé,” said the prince, as if he could see what I was thinking. “I’m going to fight Gardner.”

A civil war... “So in layman’s terms, it’s about the succession to the throne.”

“Correct.”

“I’m sorry, but please resolve this between yourselves. War will exhaust this kingdom.”

“Yes, I agree. That’s why I want you on my side.”

I was silent.

“Gardner has the queen and the magician’s association on his side. I have General Avenger and the military. If I added the demon lord of the Granzeuses, Larouza the child prodigy, the Twilight Fairy, the genius tactician Trundle, and the heavenly beast of the west, I don’t think they would start an unnecessary war knowing who I had on my side.”

General Avenger’s already been won over... He’s innocent, but it still bothers me. “Please don’t involve your subjects in a quarrel between siblings.”

“I have to. I’m tired of obeying fate.”

“I’ll state this clearly in my father’s stead... We are neither in favor of you nor Prince Gardner. If possible, we would like to see this resolved through discussion, but in the event of war, we will remain completely neutral and protect only the people of our domain.”

“Is that so?”

“I’m terribly sorry, but this discussion is over.”

I signaled to Lou and prepared to throw a smokescreen shuriken at the prince to make my retreat. But just as I held it up...

“Have you heard of ‘I Love You, My Wild Rose?’”

...my shuriken fell from my hand.

“So, you’re reincarnated too, Serephione.”

Lou and I were silent.

“Seeing as we’ve both been given a chance to meet someone from the other world, can we talk about the old times?”

Prince Schneider...is reincarnated...

“I was a high school student in Japan. Well, I say that, but I never actually went to school. I had a rare illness. My entire world, for as long as I could remember, was a hospital bed. The biggest event in my life was being moved from the pediatric ward to the general ward.”

A thin boy lying in a stark white hospital room... I could picture it easily.

“In my ward, there was a common room with a lot of books. Patients leaving the hospital would leave their books there. I naturally had plenty of free time, so I read everything. Fairy tales, manga, foreign masterpieces, literature, cell phone novels, light novels... Men’s books, women’s books, adult books, children’s books... I read them all, without a care in the world.”

Books really were the best thing to use to escape reality back in Japan...

“One of those was *Wild Rose*. When I read it, I thought it sucked. I wondered, ‘do girls really enjoy reading this kind of thing?’” The prince chuckled. “I guess I eventually died, because I woke up one day in this world. When my brother was born and I heard his name, I realized I was inside this stupid novel. While my memories were still mixed up, I was transferred from the castle to a detached palace. I was made out to be ‘sickly.’”

I nodded to indicate I was listening.

“In my past life, I was genuinely sick, and I died after exhausting myself struggling against the pain and fear with every flare-up. In this life, I had to fake being sick despite being born healthy for once, and while it wasn’t in the book, I was most likely destined to be killed by Gardner. It was a worse position to be in than a background character. How is that any better than my past life?” The prince gently closed his eyes as if remembering those times, then he slowly opened them again. “That was when I met you. I felt the overwhelming aura of a heavenly beast for the first time in my life. When I saw the black-haired girl with the holy beast, her black eyes swollen from crying, I knew that I’d met the villainess, Serephione.”

I thought back on the day I met him as well.

“You looked just like the character in the novel, but you were happily laughing with the holy beast, looking into his eyes, picking him up, and rubbing his cheeks. The holy beast didn’t show any signs of displeasure, so I knew that he wasn’t being forced to serve you like in the novel. At that time, you said that the holy beast was your ‘friend.’” The prince looked at Lou as he spoke and narrowed his eyes. “As I continued to monitor you, I learned that you had gotten Magicless on your magic exam and deftly avoided the route of being engaged to Gardner. That was when I knew for sure that you were reincarnated like me—it moved me to tears. And then I made my decision: I was going to resist fate too. I haven’t hidden myself away since then, and I haven’t hidden anything either. It seems I was born with exceptional abilities as a result of being reincarnated. My power is limitless if I put enough effort in. I can do things that the people of this world could never do.”

So the prince has his own cheat codes...

“That’s when things started to get crazy around me. People started to threaten my life every day. All I wanted to do was enjoy my healthy body and live my own life.” The prince looked down and slowly shook his head. “I had no interest in the throne, but last year my mother was poisoned... She’s still in critical condition. To put it in our past life’s words...I snapped. No more forgiveness.”

The warmth disappeared from his eyes. “By the way, the heroine’s made her appearance, right? Gardner and a lot of boys are head over heels for her, just like in the book. I’m sure you have trouble sleeping thinking about when Maribelle will use Gardner to take you out.”

I bit my lip. He’d hit the bull’s-eye.

“It’s nothing to be ashamed of,” he insisted. “I feel the same. I talked to Maribelle, but she just said stuff like ‘What? The first prince? I can’t become queen with this guy around... But he’s more prince-like. A new route?’ It was laughable. She doesn’t understand what you and I have to go through; she got an easy reincarnation. Now, clearly, nothing good can come of Maribelle and Gardner getting closer and brandishing their strange sense of justice. We have

to nip the danger in the bud as soon as possible.”

The prince hasn't fallen under Maribelle's charm. Is it because he was reincarnated? Or maybe because he's also a "villain" that would get in the way of Maribelle and Gardner's happiness?

“I don't want to be killed as a fake sickly prince. You don't want Maribelle to get her way so you die imprisoned. Our interests are perfectly aligned.”

Perfectly, huh...

“Fight with me, Serephione, daughter of Count Granzeus!”

I ruminated on the prince's story in my mind. I guess the enemy of my enemy is my friend? I can understand the hardships he went through in his previous life, and I can sympathize with the confusion and grief of being reincarnated. But...he and I are incompatible.

“Have you ever killed somebody with your own hands?” I asked.

The prince didn't reply.

“I imagine someone of your status doesn't need to get their hands dirty.”

“...I'm responsible for deaths, insofar as I've ordered people killed.”

“Well... Strangely, I remember being the Serephione from the book. I killed thousands of people. The flames I shot from my right hand could kill hundreds in one burst.”

The prince was silent.

“The animalistic screams, the smell that clings to your nose, the blood that splatters across your body... All of the ruthless pillaging... I don't understand how, but I've completely synchronized with my self from the novel, and I can remember everything as if I were there myself.”

He had no response.

“With the mindset of someone who once lived in the twenty-first century on Earth, you must understand why I never want to go back to that place.”

“...I'll just use your name. I'll preserve you as much as I can.”

I chuckled. “Do you think I'm heartless, just like they thought? That I'm a cold

person? That I can kill without feeling a thing? You must think I'm someone who can sleep like a baby at night despite remembering that hell... Otherwise, you wouldn't ask me to join a war so casually."

"Did you not switch sides and continue to fight with Galé instead of stopping with Judore?"

"Yes, I did! I fought day in and day out. That's why I'm saying I don't want to! Do you honestly think a teenage girl was fighting of her own free will?! I had no choice!"

The prince fell silent.

"You and I may have similar circumstances, but that's just one aspect of the situation. I don't just want to avoid being killed in prison or betrayed. I'm also fed up with being called a murderer. I'm not going to be your pawn! They told me they would keep me on the sidelines because I was a student in my past life too. Once I opened the lid, though, they had me on the front lines right up until I sold myself. I can't believe what you say at all."

He listened quietly.

"My dream isn't to have the glory of serving the king. It's to go on a journey with Lou as a normal girl and live a peaceful life. I don't care if anyone says I'm not fulfilling my duty as a noble. What do you think happened to me in the book when I fulfilled my duty as a noble? I was blamed anyway and killed!"

Lou stretched up, put his front paws on my shoulder, and licked up the tears I hadn't realized were streaming down my cheeks. Yet another ring of light shone around us.

"I see... If you have that strong of a will, then... I guess our negotiations have broken down."

"Yes, I never want to fight in a war again, except to protect my loved ones. The negotiation is over."

The prince sighed. "I understand how you feel, somewhat. I was inconsiderate. Sorry. But, I've already prepared for the worst. If you won't cooperate with me, I can't take the chance of you becoming my enemy, so I have no choice but to kill you. I'm a coward... Sorry."

“Don’t apologize for things that can’t be resolved with an apology. A politician must be able to drink both pure and cloudy water.”

Like Gillain.

“Understood. I will dirty my hands with your blood and live with that deed on my shoulders. You’re in my way. I must eliminate you.”

“I won’t be killed without a fight. I’ll fight back with everything I have. So...I hope we can drink tea together as friends in our next lives.”

“Yes, we can have a toast to both being in over our heads. I’d like to go to a rooftop beer garden in my next life. All I could do in my last life was look at one out of my hospital window.”

“Sounds good! Beer and edamame!”

“Perfect! Let’s meet again as regular people in our next lives!”

We said goodbye in the style of our former world for the last time and jumped backwards.

“Sere! He’s coming!”

Prince Schneider took out a short wand and waved it twice like a conductor’s baton. Sharp blades of ice rained down on the desert. If even one hit me, it would be a fatal injury. Ice seemed to be his main type of magic.

“Isn’t this unfair, Lou? The prince knows everything about us through the general while he’s trying to kill me, but we don’t know what skills or weapons he has.”

“Save the complaints for later. We have to move!”

I created flames and wind at maximum magical power, used the whirlwind to blow away the ice, and sent it straight toward the prince. At the same time, Lou wrapped the whole area in a sandstorm, hiding the two of us from view. Based on his appearance, you would think Lou controlled ice and snow, but he was the guardian of the western desert. He mainly fought with sand.

The prince waved his staff at the flaming tornado. It came to a halt, enveloped in a giant square of ice. Then, at the same moment that Lou went into the sand and behind the prince, I threw several sets of lightning-enchanted orlox-horn

kunai over the ice and toward the prince's heart. His feet were stuck in Lou's sand.

I have to kill him, or he'll kill me! My heart hurt. Tears came to my eyes. I would have to carry this burden again in my current life. *Goodbye.*

Clang!

The kunai bounced off something hard. *A barrier that my specially-made kunai can't break?! Unbelievable!*

I took my poisoned knife out of its holster and jumped down from on top of the ice. Then I swung my knife down at the prince's neck with my right hand—but something blocked my blade from reaching his skin!

I aimed a kick at his side with my left leg. There was a creaking sound, and I felt resistance from his side! He folded his body over. *Huh? What's going on?*

My left leg was starting to freeze from the heel. I cast fire magic on it, knowing that it might burn me. It didn't melt. *Is this the permafrost-level ice that my brother mentioned?*

Lou hastily appeared from the sand and crushed the ice with his front paws. Making sure that I could move my feet again, I pulled back to survey the situation while driving my knife into the spot where I'd felt resistance before.

The sand dancing in the air lost its energy and gently fell to the ground. "Lou, did you stop the sandstorm?" I asked.

Lou intensified his magic, and his silver fur stood on end. A cold wind sent the last of the sand far away.

A shield the color of amber, about one meter in diameter, appeared in front of Prince Schneider.

Did this shield block my frontal attack? No, wait... That's not a shield... It's a shell.

The shell spun in an about-face and landed on the sand with a loud thump. An overpowering bloodlust the likes of which I'd never felt before pierced through me.

"Ahhh!"

Lou barely managed to catch me as I was thrown backwards.

“Lou! Lou! What is this?!”

I should have been used to the battlefield from my memories from the book, but I couldn’t stop shaking from the utter aggression I felt directed at me.

“This is terrible,” muttered Lou.

Prince Schneider pulled the knife out of his side and held his left hand over the wound. “What’s this poison? Damn it, this is a new one. I guess I can’t beat a knight school student. Hey, put a guard up a little faster next time!”

“...THE SAND OF THE WEST HINDERS MY MOVEMENT.”

“Terl...”

Terl—the heavenly beast of the north, who I was now seeing for the first time—was shining in rainbow colors as the ice crystals surrounding his amber shell reflected the light, but his eyes were clouded.

I slowly stood up and cast yet another layer of defensive and magic-resistance magic on myself and Lou.

“I’m so scared of him... Why?”

“This is just how it is when us holy beasts confront someone as an enemy. Neither Asu nor I would ever fight you with the intent to kill, right? We should have accustomed you to this, though... No, I could never do that to my dear child.”

Pain shot through my skin with just a glare from him. My knees were about to give out. This was the same as being hated by a god. I couldn’t possibly win against this colossal beast.

A huge, but familiar, ball of energy appeared before my eyes. Rainbow wings spread out from it to hide me.

“Asu!”

“I’m here on Gillain’s behalf, given that I could get here faster.”

“Why is the holy beast of the south here?! Did you steal him from the emperor of Galé?!” shouted Prince Schneider. *As if I could do something like*

that...

Asu narrowed his silver eyes. "Terl... I see you're being forced to serve Schneider. You, of all beings, let down your guard?"

"SAND... BLAZING SUN... WHY DO YOU STAND IN MY WAY?"

"I don't imagine you can see my dear child's beautiful magic through your clouded eyes," responded Lou.

"I'll look after this handful of a man for you... Because we're friends, aren't we Sere?"

"Yes. You're an amazing friend, Asu," I replied. He came all the way to this remote desert for me. We were best friends at this point.

"So, you're 'friends' with a holy beast... I just keep learning more about you."

The restraints that Lou had been holding Prince Schneider's feet down with had worn off.

"This poison is harsh. I'd better pick up the pace before you call any more helpers. Terlnight! Blizzard!"



Terl collected magic above his head, and the surrounding area froze as a violent barrage of snow fell with a roar. Lou created a whirlwind of scalding sand that overpowered the snow.

I threw shurikens at the prince from Asu's back, but Terl's defense deflected all of them. Prince Schneider's wand moved in response, and meteorite-like balls of ice appeared above his head. They were large enough to crush me if I were caught under one. *I guess he has no intention of letting me get away out of goodwill, even though we grew up in the same place.*

Asu flew up and poured lava on the ice, destroying it, yet the ice balls continued to fall. *Just how much magic power does Prince Schneider have?* I opened my Magic Room and sucked in the ice that Asu hadn't destroyed. I reached its limit after twenty of those meteors though.

I shot off a lightning attack, hoping that it would turn the tides somehow, but it was absorbed by a bump on Terl's shell.

"A lightning rod?"

I couldn't figure out any weaknesses they had.

"Holy beasts typically subconsciously limit themselves when fighting to protect the environment and people. But Terl, having lost his sense of self...is like a disastrous force of nature," echoed Asu's voice from the sky.

I would run out of magic soon. It felt like the time I'd been captured and sucked dry of my magic in the book.

Even while poisoned, the prince had plenty of magic. He far overpowered me on that front. I couldn't see a way to beat him except for close combat...but I couldn't get close due to Terl's intimidating aggression.

"Sere! Get on!"

I got onto Lou's back as he ran, and he enveloped us in a sandstorm. I used strengthening magic on my right hand to punch the sharp ice as we zigzagged toward the prince.

Lou surrounded Terl's body with sand. For just a second, Terl stopped moving as he absorbed the sand, reducing the prince's protection. I used snow magic

like Terl's on my knife so its power wouldn't be weakened, then I forcefully jumped off Lou's back, holding my knife in both hands, and fell headfirst toward the prince. *I'm stronger than him with a weapon! This will finish it!*

The prince below me narrowed his eyes and grasped the rose on his chest. Vines suddenly burst forth from it, as though it were a living creature. The vines transformed into thick whips and wrapped around my knife, and I fell to the ground with a thump.

Pain shot through my body. My arms felt numb. *It's poison. He's returned what I'd done to him...* I looked up to see thorns covering the whips. They were secreting a plant toxin. I hadn't known he could use whips as well as a wand!

"You know, my only friends in my past life were the roses I was sent as gifts. This rose is my 'friend' in this life as well." He kissed the rose.

How princely. I see just how important information is now, grandmother...

Lou jumped onto Terl so he wouldn't aim his attacks at me. Lou was trying to suffocate him by holding him down and surrounding him with a sandstorm.

"Sere! Get out of here!"

The pain wasn't letting up. I couldn't move. *Sorry.*

This was my first time being hurt so badly. My brother had always cast defensive magic on my ninja outfit and my sparring outfit for knight school. I was in my summer uniform at the moment—the uniform pants and a plain white shirt. Ah, but it was more reddish-brown than white now, given the sand and blood...

My hands were covered in blood from deflecting the sharp ice. Blood ran into my eyes. I had a cut on my forehead as well.

The prince's whips bent above my head. How much longer could my defense magic hold?

I saw the faces of my father, brother, and grandmother in my mind. My life flashed before my eyes. *No... I can't believe it's over for me earlier than in the book...*

Gillain... I can't protect you...

As I panted and sweat profusely, Asu swooped down from above, breathing blue flames from his beak that burned the elegant rose whips.

“Gah!” The prince looked disappointedly at the burnt remains of the rose.

Asu covered me as I cowered on the ground. “Sere...this encounter was with someone unexpected instead of Maribelle, but this is the time to execute the emergency plan. Leave this to us and go overseas!”

“But...!”

“Lou and I can’t kill Terl. It’s the law of this world. The only way to end this is to kill Terl’s master, but the prince is too strong to finish off while also keeping Terl at bay, and you’re too weak. We’re in a stalemate just trying to protect you. You can get away in a better state now.”

“But...!”

“This is exactly what you made the countermeasure plan for, right? Move according to the plan. It’s already been decided! Don’t you trust Lou and your father?”

“But...!”

I don’t want to leave!

“I believe in you, Sere,” Asu muttered, as if to soothe me.

“Go, Sere!” shouted Lou in the midst of his battle to the death.

“My one and only truly dear friend.” Asu let a tear fall onto my lips.

“Ah!”

Asu spread his wings and whipped up a wind. The high-speed winds swept me up and launched me far into the distance.

“Lou! It’s over! Retreat to the sanctuary!”

Lou, who had been biting Terl’s neck, looked around, nodded in response to Asu, began to waver like a mirage in the desert, and vanished.

Asu, after watching Lou disappear, spread his rainbow wings and flew away into the heavens.

“Terlnight, you can go too,” instructed the prince.

Terl closed his clouded eyes, turned to ice dust, and evaporated.

“Ahh, she got away. Too bad.”

The prince picked up his burnt rose petals as he held his hand to his side.

“The beer garden will have to wait.”

Chapter 4: All Alone

When I came to, I was lying face down in an open grass field.

“Ugh...”

I rolled onto my back and saw the star-filled sky.

That’s right... Asu launched me.

The tornado whipped up by Asu’s wings was extremely powerful. I didn’t know how far I’d been thrown. Gillain often appeared from a gust of wind, and now I knew that he had been traveling on Asu’s high-speed winds.

The bugs here sound different. Where am I?

“Map.”

But nothing happened. Apparently, I didn’t have much magic left. I had to hurry and get some healing medicine and something to eat out of my Magic Room... Wait, was there really any need to hurry?

“I lost...”

I hadn’t stood a chance against Prince Schneider. And now that I’d fought the prince, I was a fugitive from my own country.

“Alma... Nick...” I can never go to school again.

“Brother... Grandmother...” I don’t know when I’ll see you again. I’m sorry for getting you involved when you didn’t know the situation.

“Father...” Will I really see you again someday?

“Lou...” My precious silver...

Lou and I were one and the same. I still didn’t understand why he chose me. He was at once a noble holy beast and a fluffball spoiled on Matsuki’s cakes.

I can’t live without Lou at this point. How can I go anywhere without his sweet scent from eating so much sugar? What can I do without his pure energy surrounding me?

Lou, my father, and I had decided that in the worst-case scenario, I would live on my own as an adventurer.

This plan's a pipe dream! How am I supposed to live all alone when I'm so weak?! I'm not strong like I was in the book! I know what warmth feels like now. I can't stand up on my own after being cut off from that warmth!

Lou, are you okay? You were really hurt... I can't cast a healing spell on you from so far away!

I was contracted to him...but due to my inexperience, I couldn't even sense him.

"Lou! Lou! Lou! Lou..." In spite of being as completely drained as I was, somehow tears could still pour from my eyes. "What am I supposed to do?! Waaaaah..."

I felt a soft, gentle magic energy envelop me, along with a familiar, slightly bitter magic.

"Don't cry, Miss Sere. I'll drown in your tears."

I felt my tears being sucked up from my cheeks.

"They're salty, Miss Sere. Get up."

"...Miyu?"

When I looked away from the sky and down, I saw Miyu sitting on my chest, the same size as when I had met her. She tilted her head in concern and smooched the tears at the corners of my eyes.

I nervously sat up, rested on my elbows. "Why are you here, Miyu?"

"Asu came to the swamp and asked me to help you. I said okay, because I really love you and Asu and Lou! My papa said to do my best too! So I turned small, came to the desert with Asu, and went into your shirt pocket before the tornado!"

"Asu..."

I remembered when he'd given me his tear. I also realized that I wasn't

bleeding anymore, and the rose poison had gone away. I was able to move now thanks to that.

“I trained a bunch with Asu and Lou, Miss Sere. They said I was a good girl when I did well, and they gave me tasty snacks. Asu said to do our best as two cute girls until we meet again!”

Asu...

“I see... Can you change your size now because of that training? That’s great, Miyu.”

“Hm? I’ve been able to do that since my papa became a lesser dragon. But I can only get as big as my true size. I’m just a kid, after all.”

Miyu’s just a kid, but she’s comforting me...

I smacked my cheeks with my hands. *Have faith! Have faith! I’m going to see everyone again! Lou told me I’d become stronger in the future. I’ll get stronger and make it through this! I can’t let everyone down! My dream is to go on a fluffy world tour with Lou and call it a pilgrimage! I’ll make it happen! No matter what!*

“It’s really nice to have you here with me, Miyu. Thank you! Let’s do our best as fellow girls!”

“Miss Sere, ever since you helped my papa, I decided I’d serve you! If anyone is mean to you, I’ll wrap around their neck and squeeze!”

“O-Okay...”

“Also, my papa and I ate a bunch of yucky leaves every day, and now we can spit poison mist!”

“O-Okay...”

I reopened my Magic Room, got out some healing medicine, and gulped it down. Once I could move again, I walked for a bit, found a cave to shelter in, and put up a small tent.

I had four kinds of tents, each taking into consideration different purposes and seasons. Naturally, they had extra features and magic for added

convenience, so they were rather comfortable. The bare necessities, including shelter, were a high priority.

I set up the inside of my tent, sat down to rest, and took out a piece of preserved food. As I ate it, I asked, "What do you eat, Miyu?"

"I'll absorb your magic from you."

Same as Lou, huh? Miyu is seeming less and less like a snake.

That reminds me, is Lou okay without my magic? I hope he's not hungry...

"Oh, yeah! Asu said to tell you to use as little of your magic as possible. Bad guys might follow your magic to try to catch you."

"But I'm not confident I can adventure without using magic..."

"Mhm, that's why I'll give you a little of my magic. Then your magic will change appearance, and you can use everyday spells that don't take a lot of magic. Can I give you a bite?"

"Sure."

Miyu slithered up my arm and nibbled my index finger on my right hand. A little of her magic flowed into me.

"Your magic smells like flowers, Miyu."

"That's 'cause I'm a girl!"

A girl who spits poison mist...

"Oh, yeah. When I fell from the tornado, there was a scary blue magic coming from your chest and surrounding you. It helped me land softly."

Gillain... I clutched his plate. "Oh, right. Miyu, how old are you?"

"It's rude to ask a lady's age, Sere!"

"S-Sorry..."

"He he, I actually forgot. I stopped counting after fifty."

She's my elder by far...

After one night of rest in the tent, I had most of my stamina back. It was all

thanks to Asu's tear, my brother's special recovery medicine, Matsuki's homemade emergency rations, and Gillain's cushion-like wind magic.

Gillain's wind magic from the plate was still enveloping me, although I had long since landed. Was it set up to stay active until my safety was ensured to Gillain's standards? Whatever reason it was, it did make me feel safe...

"Map!"

This time, a screen floated in front of my eyes.

"Miyu! We went across the ocean! This is Regan Island in the eastern ocean, far from Judore!"

"The ocean? I did think it was big for a swamp. I was watching from your pocket, though, and it wasn't too far for me to swim."

That's the daughter of a lesser dragon for you! I should look up to her as a person—I mean, as a snake!

"Asu sure did launch us a long way."

"He said the farther we go, the harder it would be for them to come after us. The royal family wouldn't be able to move freely because of their position."

There was no warp magic in this world. I had tried to connect two points in space and warp through an alternate dimension, but it didn't work. If I couldn't make it with my cheat powers, then that meant even if items could be stored in an alternate dimension in this world, people couldn't enter it.

So, that meant we had to move by ourselves. People with a lot of magic could use it to increase their movement speed, but it wasn't easy to cross a country or a nation. Not without being launched by Asu, at least.

Prince Schneider most likely couldn't leave the country without permission under the surveillance of the royal family—the queen.

The same could be said about Gillain. He was an emperor; the responsibility he bore was in a different league than Prince Schneider's. Even if he did hypothetically leave the empire without permission, people would speculate about war.

I couldn't be sure about Terl's abilities. Could he spin around and fly like that

one turtle kaiju from a movie in my past life? Would the prince ride on top of him? It was surreal to picture that aloof pretty boy riding Terl, though. I couldn't imagine it really happening.

At the very least, I could rest assured that I wouldn't be killed today or tomorrow.

"I wonder if Lou knows I'm okay."

"He knows since he traded magic with you. If you died, your magic would leave his body. The magic I got from you before is still all smiley inside me. I bet it's smiley inside Lou too."

Thank goodness... He'll probably let my father know too. Lou and my papa have been connected by an invisible bond ever since I kicked them both in the head...

My departure would cause issues for my loved ones. I knew to expect that. I brought it up at our countermeasure plan meeting, but my father laughed it off.

"Serephi, I'm rather strong myself, and I'll make preparations," he'd told me. "Don't worry about it. All you have to do is live happily and healthily. I would never sacrifice my beloved daughter for my own life in the first place. I'm sure your grandmother feels the same."

Father...are you okay right now?

"Asu said he'll watch the time and come back to get you, so you should get stronger," Miyu told me.

Asu was probably the fastest being in this world. He could cross the ocean. I felt bad that he had to look after both me and Gillain. Asu was the only one on Gillain's side in his country, yet he generously let Asu out to see me.

Gillain was probably furious right now that I'd been hurt and fled the country, even though it was my own fault for being weak-hearted. *Is my magic still left from when I healed the cut on his face recently? I hope that lets him know I'm all right.*

I didn't want to make my loved ones any more sad. There was only one thing I could do...

“Miyu... Let’s work hard together and be the strongest girl duo ever!”

“Yes, Miss Sere!”

...and that was to get stronger and survive until the day we could meet again!

Miyu and I went over our plans for the future. For the time being, we would go to a port town, train, and collect rare materials from Regan Island since this was a rare opportunity for me to visit here. Then we would prepare for a long journey and go farther across the ocean.

We were headed to the Kingdom of Marsche!

There was only one small town to the northeast on this island, so we headed there. Miyu and I forged ahead with gathering materials and subtly working on new kinds of magic that we would need.

“Miss Sere! While you’re not using much magic, I’ll give you some resistance to water magic! You can use the power for more than just killing. When you’re floating in the water...no, when you feel one with the water, you can reduce the damage you take. Now... No, you’re doing it wrong. You have to swim to that coast as punishment. Okay, go!”

“Ahhh!”

Splash!

“Miyu, stop pushing me into the ocean! I thought you were going to break my neck just now!”

“But I did it for your sake...! Waaaah!”

“S-Sorry, Miyu! Don’t cry!”

“As long as you understand! Okay, I’m gonna push you in super hard one more time! Go!”

“Ahhh!”

Splash!

I surfaced and gasped for air. “Hey, Miyu! There are a lot of pearl oysters in this ocean. Look at this huge pearl I found in one!”

“That’s so pretty, Miss Sere! I want to give my papa a hundred of them as a souvenir. Can you get them for me?”

“Ah, well, a hundred would be—”

“I want to give them to him as proof that I’m trying my best even when he’s not here... Waaaah!”

“A-All right, don’t cry! I’ll get them, I’ll get them!”

“Thank you, Miss Sere. And don’t come up for breath until you have at least thirty! If you come up before then, I’ll shove you back in!”

“Ahhh!” *Blub blub blub...*

“You’re walking too loud, Miss Sere! You have to quietly slide through the forest!”

“I mean, I’m not a snake...”

“Miss Sere! People are after your life! What will you do if you can’t hide yourself?! I couldn’t face Asu and Lou like that! You have to tense the space between your big toe and second toe! And don’t step on the dry leaves!”

“L-Like this?”

Crackle!

“Ahhh! Miss Sere, stop fooling around already!”

“Eeek! No poison mist!”

Miyu is so strict, even though her papa was nice... I collapsed onto the forest floor.



We’d finally made it to Tobos, the port city on Regan Island. I went to the boat boarding area in some clothes that I’d had prepared in my Magic Room to look like the epitome of average: an undyed shirt, beige trousers, and a khaki-colored mantle.

The boats headed to Judore and other countries were going in and out at a steady pace, but there was nobody at the Marsche-bound boarding area.

“Are there any boats going to Marsche today?” I asked someone who looked like a staff member.

“All trips to Marsche are currently canceled, miss. The parent company of some shipping operations in Judore has ordered routes to be diverted from Marsche indefinitely. I suppose it’s because of the political instability.”

“They did?!” *Who the heck did such a dumb thing?!* “Would there be anyone who could take just me?”

“Let’s see, someone with a boat and some free time... That would depend on how much you can pay. You could try commissioning the guild.”

“Okay. Could I ask where the adventurer’s guild is?”

“The guild is that three-story building with the brown roof over there.”

“Thank you very much!”

Tobos Guild had a restaurant annexed onto it where you could have a light meal. I ordered a bowl of harbor city soup and flipped through a binder containing commission request forms.

The soup was full of things resembling crayfish and mussels, and it was flavored well with garlic. It felt good to eat something hand-cooked again after so long.

Miyu poked her face out of my pocket and flicked her tongue into my soup. “Why do you want to go to Marsche, Miss Sere?”

“They say the best place to hide a tree is in a forest. Marsche is in turmoil right now, so the people will be panicking. Everyone will be worried first and foremost about their own safety, so if I slip into their midst, I doubt anyone would find one individual girl.”

“Mmhmm.”

“I was surprised to hear that there are no boats going there, but that also means that once we’re there, nobody can come after us, right?”

“It does! You’re so smart, Miss Sere!”

“Hey!” someone suddenly shouted. I looked up and saw a drunk man who

was clearly in desperate need of a bath.

“Whatcha doin’ here, cutie?” he said. “It’s no fun eatin’ all by yourself. How ‘bout you come over to my table?!”

This reminds me of the guys from work in my past life who would make passes at people below them...

“No, thank you.”

“Huh? I can’t hear you... Just c’mon!” He grabbed my arm. I hastily tried to push him off, but before I could, two spells activated!

The first was the reflection magic I’d used on Miyu. She was on me right now, so it had apparently treated this the same as an attack against Miyu. *Nice, it works on physical attacks too! Good job, me!*

The second was the magic that had been protecting me ever since I’d come here...Gillain’s wind magic.

Bam! The drunkard was thrown back, and he slammed into the wall.

“How thoughtless to lay a hand on Miss Sere,” said Miyu contemptuously.

The employee who had been at the counter rushed over. “Pl-Please, don’t make a scene!”

“Well, he’s the one who started this.”

“He’s the only D-ranker on our island! Look what you’ve done! Now he’s going to get bent out of shape and stop accepting commissions! It’s your fault for coming to a guild by yourself as a girl, anyway. You can’t expect not to get hit on with that pretty face!”

“Are you blaming me?” Some rage seeped out of me. I may not have looked like it, but I had a lot of pent-up anger from everything that had happened recently...so my fuse was shorter than usual.

“Eek!” The employee ran back behind the counter.

I irritatedly swigged what was left of my soup, then I took three sheets out of the commission binder and headed to the counter. “Hey.”

“Y-Yes!”

“These B-rank requests haven’t been completed for over two years. I’ll take them.” I flashed the plate at my chest.

“Eeek! A gold plate from Trundle!”

A stir ran through the room. *So, a Trundle plate holds weight even outside the country... Thanks, ancestors!*

“I’m telling you that I’ll do what that drunkard over there can’t. In exchange, let’s see... I’d just like to be taken to Marsche. Not a bad deal, right?”

The employee ran out. Just when I was beginning to think he’d fled the guild, he brought back an old man with a white beard.

“Are you the guildmaster?”

“I am the mayor of Tobos. I also act as the guildmaster because the town is small. To be honest, it’s nothing more than a title. I have no experience as an adventurer.”

“A guildmaster is a guildmaster, though. So, will you accept my offer?”

“Hmm... So, the first one is to subdue the giant octopus making trouble in the nearby sea. The second is to purify the shrine behind Cavira Falls. The third is to collect vitagrass from the peak of Mount Gidzina. Can you really do all of these, miss?”

“I don’t know how to fish, but I could lure the octopus out, right? In that case, I can do it.”

“I-I see... Okay. As the guildmaster and mayor of Tobos, I will accept your offer. Once these three problems are solved, I will secure you a boat to Marsche.”

“I’m going to need that in writing.” Having contracts in writing had come back to help me in the past!



They got a boat for me as soon as the proceedings were done, and I went straight out to take care of the giant octopus! I wanted to get it over with quickly. Time is money, after all.

I was accompanied by a local fisherman named Gan, who was muscular, wild-looking, and had the hair on both his head and face grown out. He tossed a raccoon-like animal he'd caught in the forest into the water.

“Do octopi eat meat?”

“This one'll eat anything! It's eaten everything in the ocean around here, so we have to use land animals as bait... There it is! Catch it!”

A large wave rocked the boat, and I gripped the edge. The water swelled, then a huge splash soaked me from head to toe. The giant octopus had come out of the water and wrapped its tentacles around the boat!

“What...?”

It was smaller than I expected—only about as big as a broadshell turtle. It was about three meters across. I guessed it made sense, considering it was just an octopus in the first place.

“Should we take it out with a lightning strike?” I asked Miyu. “I can use magic as long as it's just a little, right?”

“Leave this to me, Miss Sere!” Miyu chimed in. “I haven't shown you how I can help out yet!”

“I have no doubt that you're strong, but... Sure, go for it!”

Miyu slithered out of my pocket, began to glow, and grew to her original size.

“A sn-snake!” Gan the fisherman fell to his knees.

Miyu slithered toward the giant octopus without a hint of fear.

“Here goes!”

She bit down on the tentacle that was wrapped around the boat...and then started slurping it up!

Sluuuuuurp!

“Y-You're swallowing it whole?!”

Slurp. Gulp. “All done!”

The ocean was once again as clear and still as a mirror.

“M-Miyu... Does your stomach feel okay?”

“Oh—”

“Wh-What is it?!”

“Apparently, this octopus was the strongest being in this area. Now that I’ve swallowed him, I’m the ruler of the eastern sea! All the sea creatures here will listen to what I say now!”

“Whoa...”

One big slurp had launched her to the top of the stack... My precious little Miyu had become the queen of the eastern sea!

I stayed at Gan’s house that night.

“I can’t thank you two enough. Now that that octopus is gone, the fish will come back, and I’ll be able to fish again. This isn’t much of a house, but please feel free to stay over!”

Gan grilled up some dried fish that he’d saved for hard times.

“I-I can’t possibly take this much food from you!” I insisted.

“I’ll be able to catch plenty more soon enough. Don’t hold back! That goes for you too, li’l snake!”

“Thank you, Gan!” chirped Miyu.

Miyu was more than a little different from your everyday snake, but she still barely counted as a snake, so anyone could see her. I was the only one who could talk to her, though, so I interpreted to Gan for her. Oh, and now that Miyu had eaten the giant octopus that had been bothering Gan, she was a “li’l snake” to him.

“What is the shrine we’re going to tomorrow dedicated to? And why is it a B-rank commission?”

“I heard it’s for the harvest goddess,” replied Gan. “I have no idea why it’s B-rank, though. I haven’t heard that it’s dangerous.”

“Once we get that over with, we can collect the vitagrass and be done

tomorrow.”

“Don’t take Mount Gidzina lightly,” warned Gan.

“I’m not. I’m used to climbing mountains.” *Like the ones from Trundle territory!*

I could hear someone having a coughing fit from the other room. “Um, is that a family member?” I asked.

“Yeah... That’s my wife. She’s...lying down at the moment.”

“Could I greet her, since I’m going to be a guest in her home?”

Gan sighed. “I guess it’s not a surprise if it’s Miss Gold and the li’l snake... Go say hi to her. She’ll be glad too.”

I peeked over to the bed in the other room intending to just greet her, but she was lying down unconscious. All her visible skin, including her face and neck, had turned black.

“What’s going on?”

“I’m impressed how unfazed you are. Four years ago, she suddenly collapsed, unable to move, and her skin changed color. I took her to the doctor on this island, but they didn’t know what was wrong. Then someone said it could be a curse, so I took her to a curse expert to have it lifted, but I couldn’t tell if it worked or not... They said if I took her one more time, she would get well, but I ran out of money.”

That’s definitely extortion. Miyu and I narrowed our eyes.

“Thanks to you two, I’ll be able to fish again soon and earn more money. Then I can have her curse lifted. Also, you two are tough, so if you go collect some vitagrass for me, that might heal her.”

“Did you request the vitagrass?”

“I did. Oh, and the guild already has the money, so don’t worry about that!”

“She’s not cursed, Miss Sere,” Miyu informed me. She’d already looked into it, the capable little snake. Curses are a snake’s specialty, after all!

Okay, me too! Appraisal!

Appraisal was a new kind of magic I'd created right after I came to this island—I'd left it up to Lou before then. Between my knowledge from reading light novels in my past life and the evil-hating magic Lou had left in my body, it only took me about two days to finish.

The woman's body glowed blue.

Julia (Fisherman's wife)

Status: Poisoned (Mixture of poison clam, beach rose, and ocean bee toxins), weakened

I see... The doctor gave her medicine in case of poison, which is why she's still alive right now. But it makes no sense that there are three kinds mixed together...

"Are you going to use a spell like you did on my papa?" asked Miyu.

"Hmm... No, I'll go with the antidote grass. I have some on hand. I should save my magic, right?"

Miyu nodded.

Poison, though... Why was a fisherman's wife given such a complex mixture of poisons?

Appraisal!

Gan (Fisherman, Julia's husband, former C-rank adventurer)

Status: Exhausted

Gan is a former C-ranker... Other than that, he was also glowing blue. That was important. Blue meant normal. If someone's body glowed red, that meant they had bad intentions. Gan was in the clear.

I hate that I doubt anyone and everyone...

“From what I can tell, your wife has been poisoned with multiple toxins. If you can trust me, I’ll start making the antidote right away. It won’t work immediately, though. The effects should show after a few days. If you can’t trust what I say as a stranger, I don’t mind.”

“Miss...will Julia get better?”

“Yes, I can heal her. But she’s been exposed to quite a complicated poison. I can only do this if you’ll promise to keep it a secret that she was healed and you don’t let anyone see her until she’s completely better.”

“You’re saying someone on this island poisoned Julia, and they could do it again?! Don’t give me that crap!”

I made him angry after all...

“It’s only natural that you would prioritize the people of your own town over an outsider. Good night, then, Gan.”

Gan had nothing left to say.

The next morning, Miyu and I woke up at dawn and tried to leave for the shrine.

“W-Wait!”

“Gan?”

“Sorry about last night. I’ll trust you. Please...help Julia!” He bowed his head deeply.

“And what about the conditions I gave?”

“I’ll accept them all!”

I’m not taking the chance of her getting poisoned again after I went out of my way to heal her.

I took a bottle out of my bag containing a green liquid. I’d made it overnight, of course, anticipating that this would happen. Gan had good sense, after all.

“This tastes awful. I tried it, and it’s so bad, Julia would recoil even while unconscious. You’ll have to feed it to her mouth-to-mouth all at once so she

doesn't spit it up."

"Mouth-to-mouth?!" Gan flushed red.

"Yes. Then, she'll develop a high fever in the process of clearing the poison and thrash about. You have to hold her tight to keep her still!"

"Hold her tight?!" Gan covered his mouth with both hands.

What a weird way to express embarrassment... "Yes. Then, when the fever breaks, take off all her clothes and wipe the sweat off. Put her in new clothes after that."

"Take off all her clothes and wipe her down?!" Gan's eyes darted about.

"That's what I said, yes. After that, you'll need to give her some water to get her rehydrated. If she hasn't regained consciousness by that point, you'll need to give her the water mouth-to-mouth. Once all that's taken care of, if you simply let her rest, she should get back on her feet."

"Mouth-to-mouth again?!"

"Oh, come on! What's with the overblown reactions?! Aren't you husband and wife?! Why are you blushing so much?!"

"T-To be honest... She collapsed on...the night of our wedding..."

"So, she was poisoned just after your ceremony..."

"Yes."

Oh, Julia...

"I'm...a coward who couldn't protect my bride."

"But you must have at least been changing her clothes all this time, right?"

"I did change her clothes, but I felt bad looking at her naked without her consent, so I had some of the older ladies in the neighborhood wash her."

"You can't do that this time. You have to do it, even if it means Julia will smack you for it later!"

I imagine getting married to him kind of counts as implicit consent to at least be touched by him, though.

“I can handle her smacking me if it means she’ll get better...”

“I bet the person who poisoned her was against their wedding!” commented Miyu. “But a wedding is every girl’s dream! Unforgivable!”

Miyu’s eyes gleamed. Her curse magic had activated!

Let me explain. I’d upgraded the reflection magic that I used on Miyu and her papa before, so now it not only reflected attacks, it had a new ability I called Curse. Miyu could activate it in response to any danger or accident that befell her. Aren’t girls scary?

Why did I upgrade it? Because Miyu and her papa were putting in hard work, and because Asu and Lou had an eye on them. Of course, because they obeyed the pure and upright holy beasts, they could only cast righteous curses (whatever that means).

This time, Curse was activated because of the misfortune that had befallen Gan, who we were indebted to for food and lodging, and also because a girl’s heart had been broken. Our little Miyu was a pure maiden, after all.

The person who poisoned Julia must have been hit with the curse right around then. I wondered what would become of them.

“Who cares?!”

I put Miyu in my pocket and headed out for the shrine.



We made it to Cavira Falls safely. It was in the jungle in the northeast of the island. I swam breaststroke to go through the waterfall, then I went around to the other side of the falls, where there was an area above the water’s surface blocked by a boulder.

“Is the shrine in there?”

Miyu and I climbed up, dripping wet as we went, and reached the boulder. I tried pushing it. I tried pulling it. I tried moving it to the side.

“It’s not opening,” declared Miyu.

“Is it okay for me to break it?”

“With your sword?”

“Or I could blow it up.”

“But I told you to use as little magic as possible!”

“Hmm. Could you ask the fish in this lake, then?”

“Yep!” Miyu dove behind the waterfall and came back after a few minutes.

“They say you can’t break it! You have to say the password!”

I’d have to get that from the guild... They never told me about this.

“What are we gonna do?” asked Miyu.

I had no choice... I had to bet on my OP magic words!

“Open sesame!”

The boulder submerged into the ground with a rumble. I didn’t have a plan B, but...I was a bit disappointed that it opened that easily.

There was a small clearing inside that had an air as pure as that of the Granzeus mansion. Some mummified offerings and dried flowers rested on an altar.

“How many years have these been here? It’s time to get down to cleaning, Miyu!”

“Got it!” Miyu sprayed a water jet from her mouth, pressure washing the dirt away. *I feel like I saw a late-night commercial on TV for a machine that did this in my past life...*

I wiped up the water with a towel. It reminded me of going to Buddhist services, although this was better because there were no spiderwebs, unlike the graveyards in Japan. Miyu wiped the spots I couldn’t reach, and after about an hour of wiping and polishing, the space was sparkling clean.

After I used my dryer magic and cleansing magic to clean myself and Miyu, I took some flowers we’d picked in the forest as well as some fruits similar to figs and apricots out of my Magic Room as offerings. Then, in place of sacred sake, I broke the seal on a bottle of top-quality Granzeus whiskey and poured it into the stone vessel.

“Mmm! That smells good!” Miyu chimed in.

“No, no, no, no!” *Stop, Miyu! You’re going to end up like those heavy-drinker snake yokai in real life!*

“Okay, Miyu! Let’s pay respects to the gods!”

We put our hands together—wait, snakes don’t have hands—and we prayed to the gods.

“God of Regan Island, we apologize for leaving you alone all this time! We cleaned your shrine, so please continue to protect the creatures of this island!”

“Please do!”

Light suddenly shone from a crack in a rock above our heads. A white snake appeared on the altar below the light.

“Welcome, adventurers... Wait! Ahhh! Why is the ruler of the eastern sea here?!”

“Sorry, Miyu, let me just... Appraisal!”

She shone blue.

Miyu (Snake→spirit, daughter of a lesser dragon, servant of the Heavenly Beast of the East and Serephione, apprentice to the Heavenly Beast of the South, ruler of the eastern sea)

Status: Healthy

Skills: Water magic, reflection magic, poison mist, curses

“Ooh, you do have the title ‘ruler of the eastern sea!’ It’s like a boxing title.”

“Is that cool?”

“Super cool!”

“Rooaar! Come at me, bro! I mean, mister!”



“So, are you the god of this shrine?” I asked the white snake. “How can you talk to us?”

“I am the messenger of the lord of this place. I can speak with humans using my lord’s power.”

“Why did you want an adventurer at B-rank or above to visit you?”

“My lord’s wishes can only be granted by the strong. I set a base level and test the strength of those who come.”

“You test them?”

“You don’t have to fight, Miss Sere. I’ll go up against her as a fellow snake!”

“Wait! I have no intention of testing the strength of the ruler of the eastern sea and the contractor!”

“You can tell I have a contract?”

My Lou isn’t here, though...

“My lord informed me.”

“So...what is it you need?”

“It must be the will of the moon goddess that the two of you visited. My lord is...going to heaven soon.”

Miyu and I were silent.

“I want you to see my lord off into a restful sleep.”

“Does that require someone strong? Is it dangerous?”

“It is not dangerous, but my lord will only acknowledge the strong of body and mind.”

“But we aren’t affiliated with the faith of this shrine.”

“It is enough that you are connected to the heavenly beast of the west.”

“What do you think, Miyu?”

“Shouldn’t we help if they want it?” replied Miyu. “I feel bad for them.”

“Please do help!”

Sere, come on! We have to help! I felt like I heard Lou say. I smiled softly.

“I’d be glad to help if I’m able. What should I do?”

“Oh, we found someone, my lord! Thank you, contractor and ruler of the eastern sea!”

We introduced ourselves. Apparently, this white snake who served the god of this place was named Renza.

“So, Renza, does this mean we’ll be having a...going-away party soon?”

“No. I would like you to bring a shrine maiden. It is customary to send people off with a ritual prayer from a shrine maiden.”

“Where can I find one? On this island?”

“No, the last shrine maiden on this island stopped many years ago. We will need one from outside.”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t know any shrine maidens.”

“If you cannot find one, then we will just have to send my lord off ourselves. I would like you to look for one, though.”

“How long do we have?”

“Approximately a year.”

I didn’t know if Miyu and I could bring back a shrine maiden within the year, but I parted with Renza with the promise that we would meet again.

After that, I climbed Mount Gidzina and picked just a little of the valuable vitagrass that grew there.



I opened the door to Tobos Guild. “I’m done with the commission!”

“M-Miss Gold! We’ve been waiting for you!”

The receptionist who hadn’t given me very good customer service yesterday came running. *By ‘Miss Gold,’ does he mean me?*

“Oh, you have? Well, first things first, about the octopus...”

“We don’t have time for that! Come this way!”

He pushed me by the back into a small room. The D-ranker who Miyu's reflection magic and Gillain's wind magic had thrown into the wall yesterday was lying unconscious in a bed. His skin had turned black and hard.

"It's the enemy of all girls, Miss Sere," commented Miyu.

"Please help Bacas, Miss Gold!" asked the receptionist.

"Why me? Don't you have a doctor?"

"The doctor threw in the towel! It must be fate that you're here now! Please help!"

So, this guy was secretly in love with Julia? Was he jealous of Gan for marrying her? Or was he frustrated that he didn't rank higher than Gan?

"What do you think, adventurer?" asked the mayor/guildmaster, who was also in the room.

"I think this man has an idea of what's happening to him and how to heal it. You can ask him when he's feeling a bit better. More importantly, I finished the commissions. I'd like a boat as soon as you can get me one."

The guildmaster sighed. "Let's relocate, then."

"This completes all three commissions. Here's the vitagrass I collected. Please mark this down."

We sat down on the not-often-used rattan chairs in the guildmaster's office, and I gently set the vitagrass on the table. Freshness was vital for this plant.

"Do you think this vitagrass will heal Bacas?"

"Didn't Gan request the vitagrass? Are you going to use it without his permission?" The mayor shouldn't have known that Julia had been healed. Assuming that she wasn't healed, Gan should have been waiting with bated breath for this vitagrass. "Are you telling me that Bacas has higher status than Gan in this town?"

"I'd rather you not speak on this island's matters as an outsider," the guildmaster said threateningly.

Hey, now. “You know, what you said just now isn’t something you can say as a guildmaster.”

He was silent.

“A guildmaster with no intent to protect adventurers or fulfill commissions isn’t a good guildmaster. If you’ll put the town over those things, then you should quit.”

“Things were going just fine until you showed up.”

“Are you blaming me?”

Miyu slithered out of my pocket, curled up on my shoulder, and hissed at him.

“Eek!”

“I’ll tell you one more time, since you don’t seem to understand. I’ve been acknowledged by the god of this island. They asked me to bring back a shrine maiden. I’m friends with someone powerful enough that I’m trusted as a messenger of the gods. You’ve chosen the wrong person to pick a fight with!”

“I...I apologize,” said the mayor as I continued to glare coldly at him, not moving a step.

“I don’t want an apology. I just want you to do your job. Please mark these commissions as complete and make arrangements to have me sent to Marsche.”

He sighed. “I see you’re more experienced than I expected. I misjudged you based on how young and cute you look.”

I did have experience. I’d almost been killed recently. I’d seen scarier faces and scarier old people than this guy.

“I’ll make the arrangements,” he said. “And this is advice as an elder... You should do something about that cute appearance of yours so you don’t waste any more time on useless exchanges like this.”

I met eyes with Miyu.

“He has a point,” said Miyu. “I’ll ride on your shoulder from now on so stupid men take you more seriously!”

So I'm cute... I am pretty small, I guess. I wasn't able to drink milk growing up. It'll definitely be tiring if I have to explain that I'm not a kid wherever I go...

I took my knife out of its holster at my thigh.

"Eek!" The guildmaster screeched in shock.

"Stay back, Miyu."

"Miss Sere?"

In one swift motion, I sliced off my hip-length hair that had been tied back in my grandmother's hair clip.

"Did you just...?"

"From now on, I'm going to live as a boy who's a traveling snake charmer."

"Oh, no... Lou's going to be so mad!" Miyu exclaimed. "You can't cut your hair, Miss Sere! Take it with you at least!"

"Huh? Why?"

"B-Because you're contracted to him!"

"That's a thing?"

"That's a thing!"



We stayed at an inn for the night. When I went to the harbor at the time I'd arranged, there was a large man there with tan skin and dark brown eyes. He was rather handsome. Just when I was about to walk past him, he suddenly teared up and hugged me.

"Miss Gold! Li'l snake!" he cried.

"Huh? Um... Who are you?"

"Gan!"

"What?!" Miyu and I exclaimed. We looked him up and down. I used Appraisal, and it really was Gan.

"A guy can change a lot just from shaving his beard and cutting his hair..." Miyu mused.

“Misses! Julia...! Julia is awake again! And her skin is back to its original color! Thank you so much!”

She'd gotten better faster than I expected. It was thanks to Gan's loving care! *Maybe Julia got mad that he looked so messy and made him clean up.*

“That's great to hear,” I replied.

“I'll never forget what you did for me!”

“Oh, you can forget about it. Just worry about spending your lost time with Julia. Thanks for telling me that she's better. You can go ahead and go back to her.”

“Yeah!” Miyu chimed in. “Redo your honeymoon! Go be all lovey-dovey kissy-kissy!”

I interpreted for her, and the pure boy went bright red. He put both his hands over his face.

“So, this is how tolerant a Trundle A-ranker is... I'll take you two to Marsche in return. Julia asked me to. I won't let anybody else take the honor! Please, ride in my boat.”

I met eyes with Miyu. “Okay, if you insist.”

“Yeah, we can feel safe with Gan!”

“And what happened to your hair, Miss Gold?” he asked.

“About that... I decided to be Mister Gold for a bit. I'll be back in a year, so see you then! I'll use transmission magic to contact you!”

“The short hair emphasizes your innocent black eyes... It makes you look like a real fairy... Okay, we're off!”

“Woo! Time to set sail!”

“Set sail!”

Time to go to Marsche!

Chapter 5: Arrival in Marsche

I, snake charmer Fio, formerly Serephione Granzeus, am now fifteen years old! My good pal Miyu is always curled up on my shoulder, giving me extra prestige!

I chopped my hair off all messy up to my ears, 'cause when I gather it at the nape of my neck, it makes me look just like my big bro when he was younger!

Hmm... I guess I don't have to *think* like a guy too, do I?

We crossed the ocean from Regan Island into the continent of Marsche, and after about three months of travel, fulfilling commissions from various guilds along the way, we made it to what used to be the Kingdom of Marsche.

There had been a revolution, and the entire royal family had been imprisoned, starting with Tomoe. Now they were governed by a group headed by the prime minister. Between the people's hopes for change, the dissatisfaction with supply shortages, and the disruption of public order, tension was high, for better or for worse.

In the midst of this situation, I took shelter in a restaurant-slash-inn in what used to be the capital city of Marsche, Tohkun.

A lady named Yoko, who seemed to be about fifty, ran the inn. I was able to reserve a small room on the second floor by paying monthly rent in advance—including a recovery potion thrown in for good measure. Apparently, it worked well for Yoko's back pain. I figured if not for that, she probably wouldn't let a snake charmer of unknown origin and his snake live in her inn.

As soon as I had a place to stay, I went to a clothing store and bought a set of plain, Marsche-style matching clothes so that I wouldn't stand out from the crowd.

I was now about 155 centimeters tall. I wasn't done growing! My growth spurt was on its way! But since I was still waiting for it, my clothes were all child-sized...

At least my chest was too big to comfortably wear clothes made for young boys...or so I wished I could say. I secretly cried over it. However, I could cover what little chest I had with my cloak when I went out, and everyone's eyes immediately went to Miyu on my shoulder, so it wasn't an issue.

Everyone in Marsche had black hair in the first place. I blended in so well it almost made me sad! I hadn't seen anyone with black eyes yet, though. The clothes and cuisine resembled those of Japan so well, it made me nostalgic.

On a sunny autumn day soon after we arrived in Tohkun, there was a Liberation Day parade. I was watching it from the window of my room on the second floor of my lodging house, and I saw a familiar face marching.

I debated whether I should, but I decided to make contact. I shot a magic needle at Sakaki's neck, like my papa would. He instantly turned his head, looking for the person who shot it, and met eyes with me. I gave him a small wave, and he opened his eyes wide in shock.

That night, Sakaki and Yamada came to my inn.

"Lady Serephione! Why do you look like that? It is cute, though..."

"Lady Serephione, why did you come to Marsche? And your hair..."

"I had something to ask you. Come on in."

"Ah, well, our leader has asked us to extend a polite invitation to you."

"Your leader...is that the prime minister?"

They both nodded.

"Are you going to capture me?"

"We have no men in this nation capable of capturing the Twilight Lady of Destruction. However, if you ever cause harm to the prime minister, we will take you out at any cost."

I followed them to a castle that had burnt spots here and there, and they took me to a small lounge.

"It's been a while, Lady Serephione."

The man who stood up from the head of the table was wearing expensive-looking Marschean clothing.

It was the coachman...Tabuchi.

"That's how it is?!" I was shocked.

"What's how it is?" asked Miyu.

I sat at a round table with Tabuchi, Sakaki, and Yamada.

"Why did you come to Marsche, Lady Serephione?"

"Well, the royal family of Judore wanted to use my power. I'm on the run from them. I figured I'd stay in Marsche until the situation calms down."

I was telling the truth.

"Is that why you have a spirit with you right now instead of the Holy Beast of the West?" Tabuchi asked.

My eyes went wide. *"You could see him?! You didn't seem at all fazed at the time."*

That meant he was a powerful magic user—powerful enough to hide that fact.

"That's not the case. Rather, when I met you, I was prepared to die. I knew I had deceived his contractor and attempted to kill her."

That's to be expected from a prime minister.

"Well, I suppose I wasn't worth the consideration, even though I should have seemed suspicious to both you and the holy beast." Tabuchi chuckled.

"But isn't it bad to stick your head out into a whole other country?"

"No. That was the most important moment, the turning point, when the royal family abandoned their people and fled the country."

Well, it was certainly the cause of their downfall, when they were abandoned by all guilds.

"Huh? What are you talking about? I'm not following." Yamada's eyes were

darting around, but the rest of us ignored him.

“So, the holy beast decided it wasn’t worth using his divine powers over one nation’s internal affairs... That makes sense.”

No, it wasn’t for a noble reason like that... I just got my butt kicked by Schneider, and Asu launched me here...but I’ll leave it at that.

“So, why did you contact me?” Sakaki brought the topic back around.

“You told me you would repay your debt to me when we last parted, right? I figured I’d take that repayment now.”

The three, starting with Sakaki, put their guards up.

“What do you mean?”

“Firstly, I want to be informed as much as possible about Judore. Any information you get, I want it sent my way. Secondly, I’d like you to put me in contact with a shrine maiden. I need one to conduct a ritual on Regan Island in the north.”

“A shrine maiden...? There aren’t any around here.”

“Regular services are stopped right now, and the guilds won’t do business with us either, so we don’t get much information at all. We have our hands full with our own problems too.” Yamada shrugged his shoulders.

“As a kind of repayment, I’ll take on any commissions you would usually ask a guild for. I’ll ask for the normal payment, though, and it would be unlicensed activity, so I’ll need you to keep it a secret. How does that sound?”

I felt a bit responsible for crushing Marsche’s guild relationships! It was just because the princess had been stupid, not the people’s fault, after all.

“Hm... I would be very glad to have a Trundle gold-ranker working for us. I accept your offer.”

“Oh, and I can’t take on any suspicious jobs that have to do with the revolution.”

“Of course. I will only give you work the holy beast would consider respectable.” Tabuchi dipped his head to the absent Lou.



“Fio, where are you putting on your snake show today?” Mrs. Yoko asked me.

“I’m planning to start in front of the marketplace today.”

“I see. Be careful not to get heatstroke. Good luck to you and your snake!”

“Thank you!” replied Miyu.

“See you later!” we both called out as we left.

“What a precious, angelic kid...” Mrs. Yoko said to herself. “They help with the cooking and carry heavy things for me. Her silver snake doesn’t even creep me out. It’s mystical if anything... I wonder what lovely place they ran away from. I’d better let the police know their route so nobody snatches them up.”

“I heard Torino from the third district had her cat go missing,” I said to Miyu.

“Got it! I’ll look around on the roads there,” she replied.

Miyu had gone through a lot in her year away from Judore, and she had grown into quite the mature young lady. I was happy to have her trying to protect me, but...I missed being her mama...

“Good job, Miyu! Let’s go pick sleepygrass in the forest next!”

“Okay, Miss Sere!”

“I’m back!”

“Come in, Fio!”

“Let’s eat together, Fio!”

“Sit next to me, Fio! Come here!”

Yoko’s restaurant was always busy around dinnertime. The customers were friendly; they remembered my name, and they would say hello to me and pat my head. They would even pay for my food sometimes, so it helped me out financially! It reminded me a bit of the bar in Trundle Guild...

“Fio!”

“Oh, Yamada!”

“Welcome back. Are you tired?”

“No, I’m good! Come on in!”

*Hm? Why are you giving everyone in the restaurant the stink eye, Yamada?
Are you hungry?*

I went back to my room and reported the results of my commissions to Yamada. I was glad that he’d come at a good time.

“So I finished all eight commissions.”

“Whoa! That was fast. You don’t have to rush... Here’s your next commission. It’s not urgent. Also, here’s the pay for the completed ones.”

“Thanks.”

I got out a matcha cake, which I’d borrowed the kitchen to make last night, and served it with tea. The availability of Japanese ingredients was one of the reasons I’d picked Marsche to hide in!

“You’re so good at cooking despite being a noble... God, you’re too cute! But I did attempt to murder you...” Yamada sighed. “I keep getting more rivals by the day...”

“Yamada?”

“Oh, sorry, I was talking to myself. I don’t have any big news about Judore today. There’s just one thing: all Trundle soldiers have apparently left the military. They can’t be convinced to return, and they’ve scattered across the kingdom as adventurers. Since they were all highly skilled, the military has lost a lot of strength. Judore has the magician’s association, though, so they have a good amount of strength regardless.”

Grandmother, you’ve spotted General Avenger and started driving him into a corner... My condolences.

“What about the Granzeuses?”

“I don’t have any news about your father.”

“Oh... I see...”

According to the information Prime Minister Tabuchi had collected, there

wasn't any fuss around my escape. Nobody knew about my life-or-death battle. Maybe the prince had decided that it would be a bad idea to make enemies of the Granzeus and Trundle families at this stage? Or maybe he had some other plan... It gave me a bad feeling.

"Father..."

I wonder if he's enjoying a glass of whiskey in the glass I made for him right now...



Some time had passed since I came to Marsche. The days had grown longer, and it was now cicada season. I began another day as Fio.

The locals had seen me catching lost pets and collecting supplies lately, so they'd taken to calling me "Fio, the snake charmer who does anything." Occasionally, I would receive direct commissions, but my usual system was to have the reliable Mrs. Yoko write down the client, details, and payment in a notebook, which my soldier friend and older brother figure Yamada would check. I would accept the ones which he approved. It ended up wasting time if people didn't take me seriously as a young boy, after all, and it would be a pain to act as my own receptionist.

"Both you and your snake, be safe!"

"See you later, Mrs. Yoko!" I replied.

"See you later!" Miyu echoed, waving her body side-to-side to say goodbye.

"Fio is working so hard... How sweet! She even went as far as to disguise herself as a boy..." Mrs. Yoko was always muttering something I couldn't hear when she saw me off.

"What are our plans for today, Miss Sere?" asked Miyu.

"We're going to fight a junk bear and catch an elephant louse. After that, I want to test Marschean mushrooms as ingredients in a healing potion."

Elephant lice were like pill bugs, but they were about fifty centimeters long. I had Miyu add some nener grass extract to her poison mist to put one to sleep

so I could catch it. Apparently, it was used as an ingredient in what I would have called Chinese medicine in my past life. I decided not to think too hard about the details. It sounded kind of gross.

“Miss Sere, I figured it out! I can spit sleeping mist now!”

Miyu just keeps leveling up...

While we were out, three devilboards charged us.

“Hah!” I used an upward punch, a chest punch, and then a roundhouse kick to its weak point. Then I snapped my fingers to freeze it.

“Good job! That attack flowed so well, even though it was a surprise! But why did you freeze it?” asked Miyu.

“The butcher said it would be easier to accept things that are frozen. This is a small enough amount of magic that it should be okay, right?” I said as I stored it in my Magic Room (Freezer).

I followed my map to my biggest target of the day, the junk bear, picking Marschean mushrooms along the way.

The bear I fought with Nick was bigger... I clutched the little stone in my pocket.

As I absentmindedly looked at the junk bear, it noticed our presence. After we glared at each other for a moment, it began to growl and run straight at me.

I waited until it approached me, then I swung my right foot up to kick it in the chin. I sidestepped the taken-aback bear’s hind legs, then I landed a kick into its left cheek with my right leg.

Thwump! The bear collapsed backwards.

“Are you going to finish it off, Miss Sere?”

“Hmm, the commission just said to do something about this junk bear, so it doesn’t sound like it’s caused much damage in particular. Could you try talking to it?” *Lou would hate to kill an animal for no good reason...*

Miyu spit water on its face to wake it up, then she seemed to enter a deep conversation with it. “Miss Sere, this bear says she’s about to give birth, so she

came to the edge of the forest to gather food.”

Its belly did look big, now that Miyu mentioned it. I’d been about to kill an innocent pregnant bear who would soon give birth...

I quickly cast healing magic on the junk bear, then I used supersonic waves to make sure the unborn babies were okay. There were two heartbeats—she was having twins. I petted her stomach, praying for them to get along well, unlike Alma and Cecil. This was my first time petting a furry creature in a while. She was much firmer than Lou...

“It’s dangerous here, mama bear. If a human finds you, they’re likely to kill you without asking questions. You should go back deep into the forest. You can have one of these freshly-killed frozen devilboars to eat, okay?”

The mama bear dipped her head to me gratefully, then she vanished back into the forest, carrying the devilboar under her arm.

“She says she’ll return the favor someday!”

A favor from a bear? What form will that take? I’m excited to see!

We were walking back to town, picking Miyu’s favorite snakeberries along the way, when a shower of small fireballs fell from above. I instinctively used water magic to extinguish them. Miyu filled the surrounding area with mist to prevent forest fires.

“How could you use fire magic in the forest?!” Miyu yelled.

They’ve ticked off the responsible snake! I checked the attackers’ position on my map. There were three of them hiding in the forest shadows about two kilometers away. They’d probably combined their magical power to send that attack long distance.

I leapt up above the trees, took aim, and threw shurikens with both my hands. As I’d expected, they made contact. My concentration and accuracy had been finely honed in the Marschean woods. I’d also gained skill from my battle with Prince Schneider, or at least I liked to think I had. I was one hundred percent accurate within three kilometers. It wouldn’t have been a good idea to damage the forest with magic, and I had no obligation to show off what I could do with magic, either, so poisoned shurikens would do.

I touched down to the ground, collected Miyu, and went over to the attackers. They had all fainted, each having two shurikens coated in a paralyzing poison stuck in them.

“Black ninja outfits... I guess they don’t want the Trundles to know who they are.”

“Miss Sere, watch out!”

One of them suddenly got up as I peered at them and slashed at me with a knife. Just as pain shot through my cheek, I knocked the knife away with my left hand and squeezed his carotid artery with my right, knocking him out for good this time. Apparently, he was the only one with a resistance to this poison. I figured I should use more complex poisons in the future.

Miyu searched their pockets. “I can’t find anything identifying, but based on that fire magic, do you think they’re Judoran magicians?”

“I don’t know. They didn’t confess anything last time we interrogated them. They’re most likely underlings of the prince, but I could have made enemies in any number of places. They could even be from the Marschean royal family. I know Tomoe has a grudge against me, and I’m definitely on the side of the prime minister.” *Since Tabuchi actually pays his commissions!*

“Are you going to finish them off?”

“No. There’s nerve poison mixed in, so they won’t be able to come back and try to assassinate me.”

“You have blood on your cheek, Miss Sere.”

“Oh.” I wiped it off with my fist. It wasn’t a lot of blood...not compared to that one time.

“Miss Sere...can you wait for me by the lake that we rested at this morning?” Miyu asked. “I want to pick more of the snakeberries around here.”

“Okay, I’ll do some knife maintenance at the lake while I wait!”

Miyu is such a big eater.



After Serephione had left, Miyu glared at the three men with a glint in her eye. A black fog poured out over them. The men began to sweat and writhe in pain, still unconscious.

“You thought you could hurt my master and go home alive?” Miyu softly sighed. “Miss Sere is too kind... I do love that about her, but still...” She looked down at the men without a trace of warmth in her eyes. “Miss Sere would be sad if I killed you, so instead, I will put you into a nightmare you’ll never awake from. I think you would be better off dead, though.”

She smiled, showing her fangs...then looked up at the sky.

“Please come back soon, Lou... Your dear child is overworking herself and constantly crying in her heart...”



“Welcome back, Fio! You have a guest!” Mrs. Yoko called out to me as I came back from the forest. I looked in the restaurant to see Sakaki.

“Good evening. What brings you here?”

“Well...I have something to ask of you,” he replied.

“A commission?”

“Yep, a commission... Hey, what happened to your cheek?”

“Huh? Oh, nothing much. I cut it on a blade of grass.”

“That’s a knife wound! Somebody attacked you!”

“It was my own fault for not looking out. And gold rankers don’t go gossiping about people they’ve defeated.” I brushed it off nonchalantly. If anything, this scar would be perfect if I was going to live as a man.

“That’s terrible...”

“I can’t take your commission if you’re just going to sit around grumbling, Sakaki.”

“I need you to!”

“All right, so, what is it?”

“You made Yamada a matcha cake the other day, right? Please make me one!”

“Huh?”

“Yamada’s been bragging about it in the barracks. He says it was the perfect amount of sweetness for a man’s palate. Everyone is jealous. Sweets are hard to come by nowadays, right? I even brought the ingredients!”

All I could do was sigh...

I asked Mrs. Yoko to use the kitchen so I could make the matcha cake. Marsche even happened to have azuki beans, so I took some of the sweet bean paste—which had been made in bulk as preserved food—and mixed an ample amount into the batter.

“You’re good at this.” Sakaki was watching me work as he drank a cup of tea.

The cake isn’t going to run away if you don’t keep watch! “You think so? Someone important to me really likes cake, so I’ve made a lot of these.” I hadn’t fed him a matcha cake yet, though.

“Do you mean...your boyfriend?”

“Ha ha ha! Far from a boyfriend!” He was my very own fluffball...strong, cool, and much more work than a boyfriend.

“These ingredients are normal, though... I wonder what makes your cakes especially good.” Mrs. Yoko, who was always the first to taste my baking, tilted her head.

“He he, it’s probably because I say magic words over them at the end.”

“Magic words?”

“Yeah! I tell it to be tasty, pretty please! Okay, it’s done! Oven time!”

“You do the most adorable things, Fio!” Mrs. Yoko ruffled my hair.

The cake came out perfectly. *Maybe I should quit being an adventurer and start a cake shop?*

Sakaki wrapped up the green cake like a precious object and took it home. *Is he really that grateful to have something sweet?*

I'd used a direct-heat oven, so my body felt hot. When I went out into the inn courtyard to cool myself down, I heard a rustling sound and saw something that looked like bamboo leaves hanging up.

"Is that...?"

"Oh, this is a custom called the Wishing Tree. It's said that if you write a wish on a piece of paper and tie it to a branch on that tree on a starry night, your wish will come true."

It was Tanabata. I looked up to the sky to see countless stars twinkling.

There must have been someone reincarnated in this town in Marsche long ago. Mrs. Yoko had written her wishes on the papers, such as "increased business," "safety for my household," and "financial luck."

"Here." Mrs. Yoko handed me some pieces of paper in various colors and a pen. I dipped my head and took them.

Oh yeah! For my first one, I wrote "I wish to find a shrine maiden who will send off the god at Regan Island." That should wrap the situation up nicely.

I had plenty of paper left. Next, I simply wrote down "I wish to see everyone again soon." But the loved ones who I wanted to see all had their own commitments, I realized. If I wished to see them with my cheat code abilities, it would come true, and maybe not for the better.

I ripped up the paper and burned it in the palm of my hand. *Asu said to wait for the right time. I just have to wait.*

"Miss Sere..."

"Aw, were you watching?"

I was embarrassed that Miyu had seen that. *Time to redo it... Hmm...*

"I wish for my father, brother, and grandmother to live healthy lives."

They don't need any more strength, though...

"I wish for Alma and Nick to be well and make their dreams come true."

Ah, that's such a meddling-auntie thing of me to write...

“I wish for Gillain to find a companion who will stay by his side and not betray him or leave him lonely.”

I ended up not being able to do anything for him in the end.

“I wish for Asu to stay as noble as he is and to stay my friend.”

Is it strange to pray to the gods for a holy beast?

“I wish for Lou to stay exactly who he is.”

I wrote that on a light blue paper.

“Aren’t you going to write anything for yourself, Miss Sere?”

I hadn’t thought about it yet.

“You could wish for your boobs to get bigger!” Miyu suggested, to my chagrin.

I wrote “I wish to get stronger so I can put everyone’s minds at ease. - Fio”

The moon twinkled.

Chapter 6: Meeting with the Saint

Tabuchi summoned me on the night of the Tanabata festival.

“What? The saint is coming?”

“Yes. The shrine has been spreading the news that the saint has come. The plan is to use her influence to broaden our power... It’s like the gods have chosen Marsche this time,” laughed Tabuchi through a concerned expression.

I guess she’s coming to Marsche while it’s still unstable and chaotic so that she can have a surge in followers just for doing even one miracle.

“You’re being targeted by a lot of people. It must be hard.”

“Well, I have no choice but to be grateful that we’re being targeted,” replied Tabuchi. “We can’t recover on our own. Our future depends on how good the people that we can join hands with are.”

“Is a saint kind of like a shrine maiden, but higher ranking? Do you think she would come to Regan Island with me?”

“I’ll create an opportunity for you to meet her, but I would like you to do the negotiating yourself, Lady Serephione.”

I nodded, and Tabuchi sighed in relief. He had dark circles under his eyes. He must have been exhausted.

“Good luck, Tabuchi! I’ll make you another cake!”

“Another? I don’t remember ever receiving one of your famous cakes...”

“Huh? But I gave Sakaki two of them recently.”

“Sakaki!” Tabuchi roared.

Wow, talk about bloodlust! I suppose I should expect nothing less from a prime minister who’s a powerful enough magician to see Lou!



There was basically just one religion in this world. People worshipped the

gods of the land and the moon goddess, and there was no name for the religion. There were shrines anywhere people gathered, and those who wished to serve the gods worked as priests or shrine maidens. Most of them in this day and age went into such positions because their parents before them had. It was said that some people received divine powers from praying to the gods, and those powers would give them the talent to use things such as healing magic.

As a layperson, my impression didn't go far beyond ceremonies when it came to religion. I had Lou and Asu by my side, anyway, so if I were going to pay respects, it would make more sense to do so to them directly.

I was guessing there was probably a slimy underside to it all, perhaps in the relationship between shrines and the country, or maybe through money offerings, or maybe there was some kind of corrupt balance of power, but it hadn't affected me at all so far, so I didn't know anything about it. I'd been focused on staying alive first and foremost.

Now that a saint had appeared in the shrines of this world, they were celebrating. They were chomping at the bit to use her as a catalyst for their stagnant faith.

A saint... Can I just say one thing as a light novel fan? I really hope they didn't use some kind of forbidden technique to summon a high school girl from Japan. They're not forcing her away from her family and telling her to work for them while she just wants to go home, are they? And I really hope it's not a situation where the magic only works one way and she can't go back.

In any case, if she'd been kidnapped by the shrines, I would find a way to free her after we went to Regan Island.

Tabuchi summoned me on the day we'd agreed on. I waited in the front room of the audience hall in the old castle with Miyu and my escort, Yamada.

Once I got there, I realized there was a chance that the saint was actually my enemy. She hadn't appeared in *Wild Rose*, but neither had Prince Schneider. I wondered if I should arm myself, but if I messed up and put her on guard, she wouldn't come to Regan Island with me. My year was almost up. I didn't have time.

“Yamada, do you know what color hair the saint has?”

“She has gorgeous black hair. The first people to see her were glad that she matched the people of Marsche.”

I could at least be sure it wasn't Maribelle. *Thank goodness.*

The door opened with a click, and the guard at the entrance gestured to me with his chin to go inside.

I stepped inside. Two old men in what looked like white kung fu costumes stood on either side of me, looking at me suspiciously. A woman in a white dress with a veil covering her face was sitting on what had originally been the throne of the King of Marsche.

I briefly made eye contact with Tabuchi next to me, then dipped my head in a knight's pose.

“Your Holiness,” Tabuchi began, “this is the person responsible for saving my nation—”

Clatter! The sound of a chair being pulled cut him off. Then the swishing of silk brushing against itself and the clicking of high heels heralded the bright white shoes that suddenly appeared in my field of vision. The saint grabbed me by the scruff of my neck, and just when I stood up...she pulled me into a big hug.

“Huh?”

“Saint!” The people around us went into a frenzy.

She put her hands on my shoulders, and then we were face-to-face. She pulled her veil behind her.

The face that she exposed was as angry as a devil, yet still cool; it was the face of the samurai I looked up to. Suddenly, she drove her fist into the top of my head at full force!

“O-Oww!”

“Serephi, you dummy! Do you have any idea how much I've worried about you?!”

The girl glaring at me with tears in her eyes was my beloved friend Elise.

“Elise...” My entire body trembled. Tears began to come to my eyes, as if a dam had broken. “E-Elise!” I clung to her and began to cry.



Elise held me to her chest and gently stroked my head until I was done crying.

When I felt a little calmer, I realized that the priests around us were making a lot of noise.

“Saint, get away from that lowly being!”

“Hey, you! Don’t forget your place just because the saint is compassionate!”

“Be quiet,” Elise admonished them in a low, commanding voice. “I owe this person my life.”

“That won’t do! Think about your own position!”

“You’re telling *me* to know my own place?” Elise fired back.

“You’re a saint, the highest-ranking among all people!”

“It’s you all who don’t understand.” Elise loosened her hold on me, smiled at me, then stepped back to kneel down.

“Elise!”

“Saint!”

“This person is contracted to the heavenly beast of the west. In your own words, as someone who can hear the voice of a god, she is the highest-ranking among all people. I’m so glad to see you again, Serephone. I felt like my heart was being crushed when I couldn’t see you for a year.”

“Elise...” *She could see Lou too...*

The other one who had seen Lou, Tabuchi, knelt down behind Elise.

“C-Contracted?”

“Why hasn’t this been reported to the shrine?!” the priests demanded. “Show us proof!”

“You dare to doubt me and the contractor Serephone? How pathetic.”

Miyu slithered out of my pocket just as Elise’s rage was in full bloom. She grew to her original size with a flash and raised her head.

“Eek!” The priests cowered.

“Oh, you’re with a silver spirit instead of the heavenly beast of the west today? I can never account for you, Serephione.”

Anyone was able to see Miyu. She deliberately wasn’t hiding her power right now. After she carefully looked Elise over from head to toe, Miyu gently kissed her cheek.

“A blessing from a spirit... What an honor. Thank you very much.” Elise dipped her head to Miyu, and Miyu nodded in return. *We have two actresses here! They’re perfectly in sync even though they didn’t talk beforehand!*

The priests fell to their knees. “I can’t believe it’s a real spirit... I didn’t even know they existed...”

Elise stood up swiftly and looked around. “I need to talk to the contractor. Leave this place. And what happened here stays with us. If one person lets it slip, you will all face divine punishment. Understood?”

After everyone else left the throne room, I brought out a fluffy carpet and a tea set from my Magic Room and set them on the floor, just like I had in knight school when I had Elise in my room. Miyu was back to her mini size, taking a nap coiled up on the carpet.

“Wow, I missed your cakes, Serephi! This red jam inside is amazing, and this green tea is nice and refreshing!”

“Um, Elise, were you a saint this whole time?”

“Of course not?”

Right, of course! What was I thinking?! Confused as I was, I was still relieved.

“I didn’t know you could see my holy beast.”

Elise dropped her fork with a clatter. “Yeah. I’m sorry for not saying anything. Where to start...? My parents are both priests. I was raised on stories of holy beasts in a shrine, and my parents are still in a large shrine to this day. I’m different from most people because of my knowledge of the gods from growing up in that environment and my strong faith, so that’s why I could see the holy beast of the west. I truly don’t have any magic. My parents were so

disappointed...”

So she saw Lou because of her deep faith... Is that what they call divine power? Maybe that applies to my grandmother too.

“I went into knight school because I was trying my best to serve the gods and protect the shrine despite being Magicless, but my struggles didn’t end after I made it in. Sasara and I spent many days crying together.”

I hadn’t known the school was so exclusionary toward female students... My grandmother and Kodak had probably fixed up the environment when I got in.

“That was when I met you. When I went into your room for the first time, it felt even more cool and clear than the shrine, and I saw the beautiful, pure god who I never imagined I would meet, even in my dreams. Not only that, he was in an adorable form, sitting quietly and staring hungrily at our cake. I was so moved.”

She’d noticed a *lot* of things.

“The holy beast of the west is the most honest and straightforward out of the four. I was so relieved when I knew you were contracted to him. The people at the temple and the school are full of impure thoughts, but I could hang out with you without having to probe into you because you had the holy beast’s guarantee. Sasara and I had finally found a place in that school where we could breathe.”

I never realized that Elise and Sasara felt that way...

“I was so happy for that one year when I could let down my guard with you and Alma. I felt like I literally had the gods at my side. When I saw you and the holy beast fooling around together, I couldn’t believe how fortunate I was. I saw that you didn’t show off that you were contracted, and you even cast concealing magic on him sometimes, so I figured that you had to hide him. That’s why I kept it to myself.”

She even knew that I could use magic. Just how much had I dropped my guard?

“When I graduated, I felt that I’d truly made the right choice to go to knight school after having met you, Alma, and Lady Erza. I enlisted in the army and

went to the shrine to train to be a holy soldier. That was when I was kidnapped.”

“Kidnapped?” *How could my older sister figure Elise have been kidnapped?*

“I’d made people jealous between going to knight school, enlisting in the upper levels of the army, and being in line to command the holy soldiers, not to mention my connection with Lady Erza. I was kidnapped by five scummy priests and three shrine maidens and assaulted.”

“That’s terrible...” Anger emanated from my whole body. My short black hair stood on end.

“I had no way to defend myself against five men. I felt my consciousness slipping away, and when I thought about my body being defiled in addition to the violence... I decided to just bite my tongue.”

“Elise...”

She patted my clenched hands as if to reassure me. “Just when I was ready to say my goodbyes to this world, my ring started to vibrate.” She held up the golden ring on her left pinky finger that symbolized our friendship. “Lightning shot out of it. The bolt shot past the men before me and the women smiling behind them and into the heavens. There, it turned into hundreds of streams of light and fell back to earth, striking my captors over and over. Everyone in the shrine, from the trainees to the head priests, watched the lightning cleanly avoid me over that hour.”

I listened quietly.

“Had the gods been angered by the cruelty toward me? Had they granted me their power in my moment of need? Either way, it was clear that I had unleashed an extraordinary lightning attack from the heavens. It was exactly as the ancient myth told: a female saint who controls light.” Elise’s mouth curled into a smile. “You’re the one who set up that spell, right? That means I became a saint because of you.”

F-For real?

“Thank you, Serephi. I wouldn’t be alive right now if not for you.” Elise held my hands and smiled through tears.

I'm glad I helped Elise out! I'm so glad she's alive! I'm glad...but...what the heck did I do?!

“Why are you acting as a fake saint, though?”

“Well, I didn't want to at first, but they kept dumping responsibilities onto me, and I wasn't able to act on my own... I went to Lady Erza, who's the authority figure that I trust the most.”

My grandmother?!

“She nodded as she listened to my story...and then she smiled and told me to take advantage of it.”

I could picture the scene in my mind like it was happening right in front of me.

“A saint has as much power as a head of state. I was told to wield that power and reform the temple. She wants me to wipe out the scum like the priests and priestesses who attacked me.”

“Grandmother...!”

“But she also said that if I didn't have the conviction that I'm in the right, I would hesitate when it came time to wield my power. She asked me if I can vow to only take actions that you and the holy beast of the west would approve of, and if I'm prepared to serve the holy beast for the rest of my life.”

I listened quietly.

“I could never defile the life that I owe to you. To serve the holy beast for the rest of my life would be the happiest life I can imagine. I accepted right away, and now I'm using the actress spirit that Lady Erza instilled in me to destroy the old ways.”

Ah... The second coming of my grandmother... “Um... What about the military?”

“Oh, I resigned. I didn't hesitate as soon as I got word that it was the general's fault that you'd vanished. About two hundred higher-ups and three thousand soldiers resigned.”

Ahhh! You're all assuming too much about my grandmother's feelings!

“Are you disappointed that I’m not really a saint?”

“Of course not.”

Elise had sworn to live in a way that would be fitting of Lou. That made her a saint in itself.

“May I humbly ask you a favor, Saint Elise?”

“Yes, I shall fulfill anything you request of me.” Elise giggled.

She agreed right away to go to the shrine on Regan Island!

“Has my grandmother been doing well?”

“Of course she’s not well. She’s furious!”



I headed to Regan Island with Elise. It was important to get there in time, so I borrowed Tabuchi’s horse so that we could travel at high speed.

Elise had taken off her dress and put on a basic traveling outfit. I hadn’t noticed yesterday because of her veil, but her thick black hair was pulled back into a ponytail with one of my grandmother’s hair clips. She rode at the same speed as me in a knightlike manner. The priest accompanying her had been left far behind.

We continued to talk without dropping speed. I cast soundproofing magic just to be safe.

First, I told her that the god of Regan Island wanted to be sent off with a ritual prayer from a shrine maiden.

Then I told her about how Prince Schneider had summoned me on that humid afternoon at knight school to join his side, then attacked me after I turned him down, and how I escaped for my life and was going to stay in Marsche until the situation cooled off.

I didn’t include the parts about us being reincarnated or the holy beasts. I couldn’t go around gossiping about Lou, let alone Asu or Terl.

“Wow, I never would have expected that,” Elise said.

“The prince or the military didn’t announce how I’d been disrespectful? It was

at school, so I figured there were quite a few witnesses.”

“The school told the students that it wasn’t anything important and they didn’t know the details. The students who saw you being chased by magicians weren’t satisfied with that explanation, so the school and military’s relationship took a big hit.”

“Did anything happen to the Granzeus family or the Trundle guild?”

“No, I haven’t heard anything. I’ve only heard that you vanished out of nowhere.”

That was the same thing Tabuchi told me. My opinion of Tabuchi rose a bit.

“How’s Alma?” I’d left her behind as the only girl there.

“She’s gritting her teeth and pushing through. She says she wants to protect the place you’re going to return to. All of her classmates are supporting her.”

Alma sure does care a lot about me, as I would expect from someone like her. But... “I can’t go back. I pulled a weapon on not just the prince but on the head of both the school and the military too. Knight students are equal to junior officers. If I disobeyed my superior, I would be expelled and imprisoned, right?”

“You still have a place saved there, for some reason. Apparently, there hasn’t been a decision passed down yet. You’ve got more than enough credits, right? You’re a third-year student, remember?”

“Why would the general do that...?” *Doesn’t that set a bad example?* “Right! Mr. Kodak! He shielded me so I could get away!”

“He took a bit of a break. Judging by what you told me, he must have been badly hurt. But I heard he’s back in the classroom now. I haven’t heard about any sanctions for him. I think maybe the school wants to pretend that it didn’t happen at all and just put a lid on it. Mr. Kodak is trying to protect his students, I imagine.”

Both the Granzeuses and Trundles, including my father and grandmother, were living as if nothing had changed on the surface. Nobody had been bold enough to ask them directly about my disappearance. Did that mean the two were just watching quietly on the edge of their seats?

I didn't understand. Did the prince just not want to make a big deal of it and have my father and grandmother against him? But considering the assassins that had come after me...did he want to have me killed quietly? I was clueless what Prince Schneider was thinking.

"I want to help you, Serephi. What are you going to do?"

"One of the holy beasts told me to wait for the right time, so right now I'm just training and waiting for instructions."

"I see. I suppose you don't have much of a choice."

"Gan!"

"Mister Gold! Li'l snake!"

I'd made it back to the north of the continent of Marsche in two weeks, whereas it had taken me three months when I'd been going at a leisurely pace with Miyu before. Gan was waiting for me at the dock.

"Mister Gold?" Elise asked.

"Yeah. I never gave the people at Regan Island my name, so they call me by the color of my plate."

"No, I mean, why Mister?"

"Someone advised me that people wouldn't take me seriously as a girl, so I became a boy!"

"Don't tell me... Is that why you cut your hair?"

"Yes!"

"This is your attempt at crossdressing? You only made yourself more adorable... What a waste of effort."

"Huh?!"

"It must be hard on your little snake spirit too..."

Elise and Miyu nodded at each other. *Huh? How are you two communicating?*

We went over the ocean to Regan Island in Gan's boat. The wind was blowing

behind us at maximum speed, pushing us faster and faster, but the sea was calm, and the boat wasn't shaking at all.

"It must be because we have a saint with us!" Elise's two underlings, who had managed to catch up to us and get on the boat, clasped their hands.

No, I'm pretty sure it's because we have the ruler of the eastern sea on board... But I guess it's a good thing if there are more miraculous stories about Elise. It'll make it easier for her to take action.

When I got off the boat, the mayor was there to greet me for the first time in a year.

"It's been a while, mayor-slash-guildmaster."

"It's good to see you again, Miss Gold. Thank you for bringing a shrine maiden."

"Who do you think she is?!" the blond priest retorted. "She's a modern-day saint, far from just a shrine maiden!"

I decided on the nicknames I'd use for the priests in my head: the blond priest would be Kaku, and for the brunette, I was leaning toward Suke.

"A s-saint?"

"Yes. She deemed it fit to come here for the sake of the god of Regan Island."

"A saint?!" Gan panicked and lowered his face. The mayor and the other people there to greet me followed.

"Please relax. Offering prayer to the gods is my job. I consider it an honor to be called upon by a gold ranker." Elise gave everyone, including Suke and Kaku, a masterful saint's smile. It made me nostalgic for practicing smiling at the Trundle mansion. We'd been molded into my grandmother's shape so well...

We decided to go to the temple tomorrow, and we threw a party in the evening to celebrate the visit of the saint. The table was lined with all kinds of delicacies from the sea. Long live the ruler of the eastern sea!

Two or three circles of people formed around Elise. Gazing at the overjoyed townspeople, I looked over to the window. The sound of the tide echoed, and

the news Elise had told me ran through my head.

Father... Brother...

“May I sit here?”

The mayor came up to me. Miyu, who had been sleeping on my shoulder, opened her eyes slightly, but I lightly tapped her to signal that everything was all right, and she closed her eyes again.

“Are you thinking about the ceremony tomorrow?” the mayor asked.

“No, I’m sure that the ceremony will go perfectly. We have a saint on our side. Don’t worry, mayor-slash-guildmaster.”

“Oh, I resigned as guildmaster. You told me I wasn’t the right person for the job, and I agreed. Oh, I don’t mean to complain! In the first place, a mayor who prioritizes the interests of the town and a guild leader who prioritizes the interests of the adventurers were not positions that could be reconciled, but I hadn’t thought that through.”

I listened quietly.

“When you appeared in this town one year ago, it was like time started moving again.”

I did get that feeling.

“We hated change... We feared change.”

I was silent in thought.

“You brought a new wind—no, a typhoon, to our town.”

“Did I?”

“Even though we were so resistant to changing our ways, since you were accepted by the gods of the island, we had no choice but to accept you, though unwillingly. Change was the only path left to us.”

“Um... Sorry about that?”

The mayor slowly shook his head. “I wasn’t sure if it was for the better or not, but now you’ve brought a saint to this forsaken place that hasn’t seen anyone related to a shrine in decades.”

I looked back to the room, and Elise was holding a little baby and kissing it. Someone who appeared to be its mother was crying and bowing her head.

“The people are so glad to be around a saint. This confirms for me that this change was for the better.”

The mayor straightened his posture and put his hands on the table.

“I sincerely thank you as a representative of the townspeople, Miss Gold. Until the day you reveal your true name, we shall call you...the Lady of Typhoons and Twilight.”

Pleeeeeease don't!

The party continued late into the night, and Elise and Suke-Kaku stayed at the inn, while Miyu and I stayed at Gan's house.

“Miss Gold! I finally get to tell you how grateful I am. Thank you so much!”

Julia was up and walking! I was a little moved! And she was a young, exotic beauty too! She looked to be about twenty. When would that mean she got married? Around fifteen? A young bride... Gan really had it made.

Gan had also become the new guildmaster, surprisingly.

“I can only work when I'm not fishing, but I'll do my best to make you proud, Mister Gold.”

Yep, just don't burn yourself out.

I quietly asked him when Julia wasn't there, “What happened to Bacas?”

Gan's face immediately went cold. “He vanished without ever apologizing to Julia, and so did his minions in the guild who stole my vitagrass. One of the small boats was missing. Perhaps they went to a doctor in the city? Well, it doesn't matter anymore.”

How foolish. If he had just repented and confessed to his poisoning, Gan and Julia would have been kind enough to forgive him and give him the antidote.



Miyu, Elise, and I finally reached the shrine. The mayor and Suke-Kaku were enthusiastic to attend the ceremony, but they couldn't keep up with us in the

jungle.

After we swam through the waterfall basin, the cleanliness-loving Miyu cast drying and cleansing magic on all three of us.

“Open sesame!”

Vwooom! We entered the rear shrine.

“Ah, contractor, ruler of the eastern sea, thank you so much for bringing a shrine maiden!” Renza’s voice sounded tearful, although it was telepathic.

“We made it in time, right?!”

“Yes, yes!”

Thank goodness...

Miyu grew back to her original size.

“You have grown stronger and more beautiful, ruler,” Renza said.

“Oh, not at all. I have more to grow,” replied Miyu.

So, Miyu has no idea how much she’s transformed over this past year...

Renza turned to Elise. “I see this is the shrine maiden. She is as pleasant to be around as you, contractor.”

“Wow... I can hear the envoy’s voice...” Elise whispered to me. She was wearing the same pure white dress she wore when we reunited, out of respect to the gods.

“The envoy can communicate his thoughts to us using the power of the god here,” I explained.

“I see... It is an honor to meet you,” she greeted Renza. “My name is Elise. I will perform a ritual chant today to the best of my spiritual ability for the god of Regan Island.”

“Yes, thank you. Let us begin the preparations without further delay.” Renza slid down from the altar and began to slither on the ground around the rock we were on. He drew a circle and some letters, and his trail began to glow blue.

“This is...a magic circle!”

We stuck to the stone wall at the edge of the room so we wouldn't get in Renza's way. He took about twenty minutes to draw a complex mystical circle; it was about two meters across, and it looked incomprehensible to humans. He was dripping with sweat.

“Are you okay, Renza?”

“It's done! Lower your heads!”

Elise, Miyu and I hastily knelt down and bowed our heads.

At the same time, the circle on the ground began to glow with a blue light, and an immense power began to swirl within the rear shrine. Then a spray of water burst forth from the ground...the light was reflected...and from behind the sparkling spectacle...

...the enshrined god appeared before us, clad in blue scales, their long body stretched out horizontally, their large eyes shut, and their silver-white beard and horn pulled close to their body.

It was...the Azure Dragon!

“It's the heavenly beast of the east!” Elise almost screamed, pressing her face into the ground.

Miyu and I bowed our heads low as well, overwhelmed by the strong, magnificent, yet tranquil magic presence. We had entered the holy ground of the heavenly beast of the east.

“Lift your faces,” a quiet, feminine voice echoed in our minds.

“I can...hear her...” Elise trembled.

The heavenly beast of the east slowly opened her eyes. They were like azure jewels, and they seemed to see through everything. “I can see why Renza supports you,” she said.

She lethargically moved her eyes and nothing else; it seemed like she had difficulty moving very much anymore.

She fixed her gaze on Miyu. “Daughter of the lesser dragon. You shall be my

successor. Understood?”

Miyu’s eyes went wide after suddenly hearing the last thing she expected to hear. “Eh? M-Me, your successor?”

“I have decided, daughter.”

“Pl-Please wait!” I hastily butted in, though I knew it was disrespectful. “The lesser dragon has entrusted Miyu to me for the time being. Please explain your decision to me in more detail.”

Renza opened his mouth. “Kilama has recognized the potential of the ruler of the eastern sea and designated her as the next heavenly beast of the east. If she does not take over, Kilama cannot depart.”

“W-Wait! The heavenly beasts are born of the moon goddess, right? That’s not true of Miyu!”

The heavenly beast—Kilama—slowly turned her gaze to me. “I see... You are the contractor of the west, which explains why you know so much. I sense the magic of the south as well. It is a pleasant magic. It is true that our successors are born of the moon goddess and raised long before taking our place. However, that is not an absolute rule.”

“I see.”

“At the time of my decline, the moon goddess sent Renza to me. I raised Renza to be my successor.”

I looked at Renza. He had a calm expression.

“Renza then told me that there is one more suitable to be a heavenly beast than him, so he stepped down. He has decided to assist the next generation instead.”

“Renza...”

“Miyu is unmistakably stronger than me, in both body and mind,” Renza said. “How could I become a heavenly beast when someone like her exists?”

“She’s taking over before the ceremony to send Kilama off...” Elise muttered in amazement.

This was a divine order. It couldn't be refused. *Miyu...*

Miyu lifted her face. Where there had once been hesitation was now determination and bravery. She slithered up to Kilama and dipped her head again. "I humbly accept."

"Miyu!"

She slowly turned to face me. "I want to be stronger, Miss Sere. I'm going to get a lot stronger, and then I'll protect you along with Lou and Asu!"

"Miyu..."

"Yes, you shall become stronger, Miyu. Come here." Kilama urged Miyu into the magic circle.

Miyu moved forward cautiously, stopping before Kilama's face.

"Miyu, you shall accept all that has been handed down through generations of heavenly beasts since ancient times." Kilama then whispered something that us humans couldn't comprehend and placed a kiss on Miyu's brow.

Just then, Kilama's blue magic began to flow toward Miyu like a gust of wind. The magic, the very manifestation of divinity, shook the air itself. Elise and I crouched down and held each other. It was a terrifying scene...but we couldn't take our eyes off it!

The blue light began to fade.

"Kilama..." Renza shed a tear. Kilama's blue-shimmering scales had all turned pure white, and her eyes were shut.

"Miyu...!"

My Miyu had grown two sizes larger. Her scales had gone from silver to azure, and she had grown a magic-imbued horn on her head. The last of the wild beast scent clinging to her had gone away, and in its place was a new, powerful magic force.

This was the birth of a young holy beast. My Miyu had become a true ruler—a true goddess.

"Miss Sere..." Miyu's voice sounded like that of an adult woman.

I looked up at her. “Miyu...you’re glowing! It’s so beautiful. Kilama must have recognized your upstanding way of life. Congratulations.”

“M-Miss Sere! I’ll do my best, so don’t leave me!”

“What are you talking about? You’re the heavenly beast of the east now! It would make no sense for me to leave you.”

“Then make a contract with me! Please!”

“A contract?”

“If we don’t make a contract, then I won’t know where you are! I won’t be able to come to you if you need help! I know I’m weaker than you, but...but I’ve decided to serve you ever since that day!”

A contract? Can I even do that, even though I have one with Lou already? Wait... “Miyu, when you say you won’t be able to come to me if I need help, do you mean you’re going away?”

“She must spend some time—at least a few years—in this holy territory. It is important for her to get used to her new body and knowledge,” Renza replied.

“Oh...”

I’m going to be alone...

But I can’t hold Miyu back. I can’t tell her I’ll be lonely. She’s been with me all this time, apart from her papa. I should be grateful, not needy.

It’s just selfish of me to be scared to be alone.

“Miyu, do your best as the heavenly beast of the east. Listen to Renza for me. I’ll visit sometimes, okay?”

Miyu shot a burst of intimidating energy, blowing my short hair back. “Sometimes isn’t enough! I want to make a contract!” Then she bit one of her scales and tore it off. Blood began to seep out.

“Miyu!” I rushed to try to heal it.

“Miss Sere, drink my blood! I’ve already received your blood!”

Miyu had always licked my wounds when I got hurt. I looked around the area in search of help, and just then, Kilama’s voice echoed in my mind once more,

although she was still motionless.

“It would be good of you to make a contract.”

“But I have one with Lou!”

“There is no rule that prevents contracting with multiple holy beasts at once. There has just been no human beloved by multiple holy beasts at once before. Grant Miyu’s wish.”

I couldn’t go against a god. My internal hesitation vanished.

Miyu looked at me as she bled. I remembered that the blood I’d gotten from Lou was also a result of him hurting himself. My beloved holy beasts were all so pushy...

“I think of you like a little sister. I love you, Miyu. Thank you for being there for me.”

“Miss Sere... Serephione, I offer you my loyalty once more.”

I kissed Miyu’s wound. Her thin blood tasted like iron, yet it also had a slight floral scent.

A circle of light fell around me and Miyu, closed in around us, and disappeared into our bodies.

Kilama looked on happily. “How auspicious.”

Now that I had stopped Miyu’s bleeding and the succession had been taken care of, it was finally time for the ceremony to send Kilama off.

Renza began to slither on the ground again, surrounding the magic circle Kilama was in with a large diamond. He drew a complex pattern at each point, and a mandala-like world unfolded.

Renza slithered up to Kilama in the center, whispered something, shed a tear, and went outside the circle.

“Miyu, please take your position,” he instructed. “Could you lend me your power, contractor?”

“Gladly. What should I do?”

“Stand on the north point of the diamond and send your magic to Kilama with gratitude once the shrine maiden begins her chant.”

I went to the north point of the diamond and gazed at Kilama’s back. The circle was filled with a power so cool and clear that it frightened me. Miyu went to the eastern point of the diamond at the same time.

Elise then held up local flowers and tree branches as an offering.

“Kilama!” cried Renza.

“Be well, all of you...” Kilama used the last of her strength to wink and smile, then closed her eyes.

Elise bid goodbye in a clear, slightly sad voice, and she began to chant a prayer of thanks for the great love Kilama had given. At the same time, Miyu and I sent our maximum magic power to Kilama.

“You are so synchronized... I can see why Lou and Miyu have stayed by your side, contractor. What pure, gentle magic...”

“Kilama...”

I’ve only known her for a short time, but... Kilama is so awesome! I love her! I’ll never forget her!

I held back tears as I poured even more of my feelings into my magic. Renza’s voice joined Elise’s.

The diamond began to shine a blue light to the heavens. It was a tower of light in the same shape as the pattern.

Voom! Voom! Two huge bursts of magic fell down like meteorites. They turned the area pure white like bullets of light, and I couldn’t see anymore!

“Don’t stop!” cautioned Renza when I lost my composure. I held my hands out even though I couldn’t see, and I continued to release magic.

I felt a familiar magic presence near me...one I’d been dreaming of. The light that had blinded me was slowly fading away.

“Ah...”

On the western point, to my right...was Lou.

On the southern point, across from me...was Asu.

They looked as divine as the last time I'd seen them.

"Thank you for your long service, Kilamageld."

"Thank you, Kilamageld. Let us meet again."

"We are sending her off," Renza said with a chuckle. "Asu, Lou, Miyu, you may do as you see fit."

The moment that the magic forces from each point on the diamond unified with Elise's chanting, Kilama went to heaven.

I looked at the middle of the now-empty magic circle...and shifted my gaze to the side.

My beloved silver was there. Lou, at his full size, tilted his head. "Sere?"

"Am I dreaming?"

Lou came out of the circle, leapt into the air, transformed into his miniature size, and landed on my shoulder. He gazed at me and licked up the tears that I hadn't realized were rolling down my cheeks.

"Are you a crybaby now, Sere?"

"Ahh... Lou...! Lou...!" I sobbed and buried my face in Lou's neck. *It really is him! It's Lou's pure scent! My little fluffball!*

"I'm back, Sere." Lou's eyes were a calming sky blue.

"I'm glad you're back, Lou..." I said through tears. Holding Lou tight, I finally returned to my original self.



Asu smooched my head with his beak as I held Lou and cried. “You did well, Sere. I’ll leave you and Lou alone for today. I’m not insensitive enough to bother you.” He gently patted Miyu’s head before spreading his rainbow wings and flying off into the heavens.

I checked that Lou hadn’t gone anywhere before I finally lifted my head. Elise, Miyu, and Renza were all in tears.

“Lou! You’re late!” cried Miyu.

“Miyu, you’re in the seat of the east now... That makes us equals from now on. Also...thank you for protecting Sere while I was gone.”

“Lou... Waaah!”

Lou and I curled up to the sobbing holy beast and promised to come visit once in a while.

I left Miyu, who was sleepy from using her new power, with Renza, then exited the shrine.

As we went back to Tobos, Elise greeted Lou. “It is a great pleasure to meet you, heavenly beast of the west. Please forgive me for anything disrespectful I have done to you or your contractor thus far.”

Now that Kilama was gone, Elise couldn’t hear Lou’s voice. I interpreted for him.

“Thus far?” Lou didn’t understand what she meant.

“Lou, Elise could see you this whole time, you know.”

“Wha?! I-I knew that! For sure! That aside, Sere...” Lou whispered to me.

“Lou wants to know why your aura is so similar to my grandmother’s now, Elise!”

“Nooo! I’m not a demon like her!”

Elise took 3000 damage!

“An attack on my blind spot... The power of the heavenly beast of the west is truly not something to be trifled with...”

“Elise?”

“R-Right... Um, would it bother you if I used the title of Saint?” she asked Lou.

Lou looked intently at Elise. “I don’t mind. I’m not particularly interested in that title. But, you know, that might be a hard path for you.”

“I’m prepared for that.”

“All right.”

On the way back to Tobos, Lou and I taught Elise some basic everyday magic. She could see Lou, so there was no way she couldn’t use any magic at all. I had her imagine magic circulating from her heart and guided her by letting a bit of my own magic flow into her.

“Wow, Lou, Serephi! I feel a bit of energy moving around inside me!”

Now that she could recognize magic, we hammered cleansing magic, transmission magic, and a spell to surround herself with static electricity into her. She mastered them with her preexisting willpower. With these, she could communicate with us from anywhere and fight back if she were attacked by scum. The way she faintly discharged the spells from her body was saintlike.

Elise’s transmission magic was a long, blue dragon that soared into the sky.

“Kilama?”

“Yes, I never want to forget this special day or Kilama. I’ll make sure to fulfill the destiny I’ve been given by the gods who allowed me to observe the sending off and succession ceremonies today.” Elise’s eyes burned with determination.

“It sounds like you have an unpayable debt to Kilama...” Lou mused.

Suke-Kaku ran up to the newly polished Elise with zealous joy once we got back to Tobos. I told the mayor and guildmaster Gan about how the ceremony went. “The ceremony went well, thanks to our saint. I think the gods will be happy if you pay the shrine a visit every so often. It doesn’t necessarily have to be a B-ranker anymore, as long as it’s someone with the stamina and purity of heart to reach the shrine.”

Now that the position had been taken over and I’d made a contract with the new holy beast, strength was unnecessary.

“Was the island god angry that we haven’t been offering them prayer for a long time? Will they continue to protect the island from now on?” the mayor asked.

“The gods know everything, you know. It all depends on how the people are from now on. I can at least say that the sea will be calm and fruitful.” Elise smiled thoughtfully and graciously.

Of course. No creature could overtake the current ruler of the eastern sea.

“That’s good...” the mayor breathed.

“Where’s your li’l snake, Mister Gold?” asked Gan worriedly.

“Miyu...went on a journey to become stronger.” Miyu was a holy beast now. I shouldered the duty of keeping her a secret.

“I see... Could you tell her that I haven’t finished repaying my debt to her?”

Roger.

I got on Gan’s boat again with Lou, Elise, and the priests, and we went back to the continent of Marsche. Elise went off to her next destination from there, promising to contact me on the down low. I waved goodbye to Gan and left.



Lou and I set up a tent on the beach. I gazed up at the sky full of stars, enveloped in the fluff of a full-sized Lou.

“How have you been?”

“I’m good now. How about you, Sere?”

“Me too. I’m good now.”

Lou licked my cheek.

“Why did you appear at the sending-off ceremony?” I asked.

“The way the ceremony went today was as close as possible to the ancient form. When one of us is ready to pass away, it’s a custom to gather their successor alongside the other three holy beasts to send them off. But it’s rare to have someone who can draw the magic circles as well as Renza, and it was also a miracle that we found a shrine maiden in time. Most of the time, we can’t

fill all of the conditions. When my father passed away, I sent him off quietly by myself.”

I wish I could have met Lou’s father...

“I was able to come over the ocean to you because Kilama passed down the right knowledge to Renza and activated the summoning diamond. Summonings to send off gods take precedence over everything else. Kilama knew everything that happened, although she wasn’t able to move for the past few years, and she took a stand for me in her last moments.”

“Did Asu predict all this? Is that why he launched me to Regan Island, where Kilama’s holy grounds are?”

“He might have.”

“What about Terl?”

“He can’t be summoned while his mind is under outside influence. We were able to complete the ceremony this time because you filled in for him. It was a good ceremony. We sent Kilama off beautifully.”

“What have you been doing all this time?”

“I was being punished for breaking a taboo.”

“What taboo?”

“I attacked Terl.”

“Oh...”

“The heavenly beasts must respect each other and behave nonviolently. It’s important to the balance of this world. I broke that law.”

“You were being punished...because of me?”

“It’s not your fault, Sere. You and I are one and the same. When you got attacked, it was the same as being attacked myself. It’s only natural that I’d fight back. I don’t regret it at all.”

“Did the same thing happen to Asu?”

“I think so.”

“Asu was being punished because of me too? And he couldn’t be with Gillain for over a year?”

Oh... That’s awful. I’m such a burden...

Not only had Lou and Asu been punished because of me, I’d taken away Asu, the only person Gillain could trust.

“I... I’m so hopeless...” I buried my face in my legs.

“I knew it would hurt you if I told you what was going on. But you’re my mirror. I can’t bend the truth for you. Asu, Gillain, and I all made our own decisions knowing full well what they entailed. There’s no need for you to worry your little head about it.”

I listened silently.

“What if you had been in my place?” Lou asked. “What would you do if I were in trouble and Isaac wouldn’t let you help me?”

“I’d help you. No matter how angry he was afterward.”

“Exactly.”

“Did the punishment...hurt?”

“Only as much as you did. The purification ceremony ended thanks to Kilama. The goddess oversaw my summoning. That’s all.”

“Is Terl not being punished?”

“He has to go himself, or it doesn’t mean anything. I’m sure when he’s back in his right mind someday, he’ll go running to the goddess all pale in the face.”

“Are you hurt?”

“Nope. I have a bunch of your magic in me now!”

I smiled in relief and buried my face in Lou’s neck. “Lou...don’t ever leave me again.”

“Sere... Things are back to normal. Relax. You did well.”

My body drank in Lou’s presence, which it had sorely missed. My uneasiness melted away.

“Can I ask you one thing, Sere?”

“What is it?”

Is it how much stronger I've gotten while you were away? Why I ended up in Marsche? My current standing in Marsche? How my journey with Miyu went? Ask me anything! I actually worked really hard!

“Why did he call you Mister Gold?”

“*That's* what you want to know?”

“Also, what's up with that new hairstyle? It's like a carefree kid's.”

“Is that all?”

Chapter 7: The Promised Sixteenth

Hello, everyone! Now that my snake is gone, I'm neither a snake-charmer nor snake-charmed—I'm just Fio, the odd-jobs girl!

After I reunited with Lou, I rode back to Marsche on his back, and he checked how much progress I'd made since I was gone. When we reached Mrs. Yoko's inn and I showed him around my current castle, he told me that the premise that I was a boy was too forced, and I had to stop.

"What boy is this pretty and delicate?! People may have been deterred because it was long and well-groomed, but this hacked-off hairstyle looks so friendly that everyone and their brother is coming up to you! I'm sick of it!"

You don't have to say I look like a kid and then call it hacked-off...

When I was forced to go confess to Mrs. Yoko that I was a girl the whole time, she looked at me with pity in her eyes. *Why?!*

"Mrs. Yoko, do you think I should go apologize to the regular customers for misleading them?"

"Oh, I don't think that'll be necessary... By the way, what happened to your silver snake?"

"She went on a training journey!"

"What?! All by herself? You're stricter than I realized."

Miyu is the one who's strict!

Then, I went to the old castle to thank Tabuchi for creating the opportunity for me to meet Saint Elise.

"Oh! It's the heavenly beast of the west! It was all my fault that your contractor was hurt before. Please don't punish my country for my sins! Punish me alone!" Tabuchi groveled, pressing his head into the floor.

"Uh... Sorry, Sere, I don't know what he's talking about."

“Sorry, Tabuchi, but he’s completely forgotten. You can let it go now. Anyway, I brought cake today!”

“Cake!!!” Lou shouted.

“He’ll...let it go that I turned my sword on his contractor, his other half? He’s...saying I should focus my efforts on reconstructing Marsche...so it doesn’t receive divine punishment? How merciful...”

Why are both of them crying?

As I interpreted Lou’s words to Tabuchi, who couldn’t hear them, I cut up the cheesecake and served it with green tea. Lou ate it with bloodshot eyes. It was a little frightening.

“We performed the ritual to send off the god of Regan Island. We couldn’t have done it without you giving me the chance to meet the saint. Thank you!”

“I’m just glad I was able to help. I’m also glad to see that with the heavenly beast back at your side, you seem softer and more relaxed.”

Did I really look that unstable? I smiled sheepishly.

“I’ll be staying in Marsche for a while yet. I hope you don’t mind having me.”

“Thank you for your loyalty to Sere and Miyu in my absence,” Lou said.

“Your Holiness! I hate that I can’t offer you any hospitality at this time, but I hope to continue a long relationship with you,” Tabuchi responded.

“Oh, yeah, Lou, Tabuchi could see you the whole time too!”

“What?!” Lou began to choke. Apparently the cake had gone down the wrong pipe.



“So, Lou, do you think we’ll clash with Prince Schneider again?”

“Well, we can’t avoid him forever.”

“I think his weakness is probably fire.”

Fire would be the most effective way to counter ice and roses at once. The prince had probably made some progress too, though.

“I’ve been working hard on building stamina and physical strength. Miyu taught me water magic too. I want to improve my fire magic next.”

“Hmm... To be honest, we’re already on the same level when it comes to fire magic. I can’t teach you much. Should we call the other guy?”

“No. I don’t want to take Asu away from Gillain.”

“Then I’ll teach you my sand magic. If you raise the temperature, you can melt most things with it.”

“Okay, thanks! Wait, but is it okay for me to use magic?”

“Asu and I are back now. You don’t have to worry, as long as it’s not enough to stand out in a bad way. If Schneider makes it all the way here... I’ll just have to turn the tables on him!”

Lou took me to a deserted beach to give me lessons on scalding sand. He gave me some of his magic, which made my own magic harder for enemies to detect and increased my affinity for sand as a bonus. Yay for doping!

“Sand is freer than earth. Don’t picture clumps of dirt, picture manipulating each individual grain of sand.”

Thanks to Lou’s magic, the beach sand gathered at my fingertips.

“Pull it in!” Lou commanded. “Okay, now create a wind and blow it away! There you go. Next, add water and compress it. That’s decent. Okay, do all of that a hundred times! Go!”

“Uryah!”

“Make it flow more gracefully! You can’t make my element look messy as my contractor! Ahh! No good! Do it again! Make it clean! Righteous! Beautiful!”

I feel like I heard that catchphrase at some gathering of women? I’ve been dressing as a boy lately, though!

“What should I do in areas where there’s no sand, Lou?”

“There’s sand just about anywhere. No matter how much clay is in the soil, you’ll hit sand if you dig a few dozen meters. Don’t worry about it. Now, let’s get this done by sundown!”

“Okay!”

Once I could control sand, I began the process of heating each individual grain to high temperatures. During this training, I continued to take requests for odd jobs. The days grew shorter, the winds grew colder, winter came, and then it was a new year.

I turned sixteen, and I finally hit 160 centimeters! I was rounding up a little, but who cares about a bit of a rounding error?! Four goes up, five goes down! I was taller than in my past life!

But...everyone was huge in this world. Elise was a girl, but she was a head taller than me. *Ah, I give up. I'm done being down over it now! I'm petite! He he!*

My hair had finally grown to shoulder-length in the last six months. I had Mrs. Yoko cut it for me, and I ended up looking like a Japanese doll...it made me cry. My learning priorities changed. I had to learn how to do a shaggy haircut before scalding sand or fire magic!

Sweet sixteen... I was at the age where I could have legally gotten married in my past life.

Marriage, huh... Nothing to do with me.

On my birthday the year before, I'd just been settling down in Marsche with Miyu and hadn't felt like doing anything special. And this year...I was being put to work in the kitchen as soon as I got up.

“Sere, put more powdered sugar here!”

“Got it!”

I was being forced to make a double-tiered chocolate cake. Let me reiterate, this was my birthday! Not Lou's!

“Fio, are you going to eat that gorgeous wedding cake all by yourself?” asked Mrs. Yoko.

Huh?! I don't plan on getting married!

Mrs. Yoko was looking at me with pity in her eyes.

Darn it, I forgot that she could see Miyu, but not Lou! She thinks I'm a loner celebrating all on my own...

Needlessly exhausted, I returned to my room with an extremely excited Lou.

"All right! Congrats, Sere!"

Bwoof! Lou dove straight into the cake without waiting for a response.

"Is it good, Lou?"

"Mmnng!"

"Can you breathe in there?"

"Mmnngh..."

I was happy that I was able to spend my birthday with Lou, at least. I drank tea in a state of enlightenment.

I took out the letter that I'd received from Elise earlier to give it another look. It had come to me in the form of Kilama again.

"Happy birthday, Serephi," it read. "I went back to Judore for the first time in a while the other day and visited Lady Erza. She was relieved to hear that you were doing well in Marsche and reunited with Lou. She said she would make sure to let your father know as well."

I continued to read the letter. "I told her about how you escaped, and she nodded and filled me in on what Mr. Kodak told her. She said that if she contacted you, it would give away your location, so she won't contact you directly. Everybody knows that Lady Erza and I are connected, so I don't think it's too unusual for me to visit Trundle territory."

"It's not a secret that I'm friends with you," she went on to say, "but I'm very busy as a saint nowadays, so I don't think anybody realizes that we're close enough to still be in contact. As you can imagine, it would lead to speculation if I met Count Granzeus, but if it's not urgent, I can get information to him through Lady Erza."

"I wish you a peaceful year. Your lifelong friend, Saint Elise."

"She called herself a saint?!"

As I folded up the letter, I recalled my childhood in the Granzeus domain. On one snowy day, my father rested me on his lap as we ate Matsuki's cakes with my grandmother, Enrique, and Martha, and we watched my brother perform a magic show for us. He made a snowman dance and sing, and at the end, it turned into ice cream and leapt into his mouth. My brother took my hands to dance a waltz with me, spinning me around and making my gown change colors.

I hugged everyone and told them, "That was amazing! Thank you!" Ah...such happy memories...

I wonder if my thankfulness will reach all the way to Judore?

"Ah!"

A familiar magic appeared! My small room filled with light.

"Asu!"

"My, how unseemly..."

Here come the insults! I ignored Lou's fuss and hugged Asu.

"Asu! Asu! It's been so long!"

"Sere...I missed you."

"Me too..." I teared up. "You're finally here..."

Jeez, I've been crying all the time lately... I breathed in Asu's scent, that of warm sunbeams.

I took some ice cream out of my Magic Room (Freezer). It was marbled with vanilla and chocolate. I'd made it so I could serve it to Asu.

"You have good taste to bring out ice cream in the cold winter!"

Yes, I agree. I thought the same thing when I was a student.

Asu shrunk to miniature size and started eating the ice cream happily.

"I'm sorry, Asu. You took a punishment for my sake."

"I thought you went over this with Lou already. What do you say at times like these?"

“Asu... Thank you. I love you.”

“Correct.”

“Hey, quit ignoring me!” Lou had returned from cake heaven.

“Asu, is Gillain angry that you were gone because of me?”

“He’s not angry about that. He’s angry at himself for not having the freedom to immediately help you.”

“Tell him thank you, and that I’m all right now. I noticed his magic protecting me many times.”

I hadn’t thought about it, but it had vanished ever since Lou had come back.

“It’s probably gone away now that your mind is calm again.”

Gillain cast delicate spells, unlike his scary face.

“Do you know what’s going on in Judore?”

“Gillain has been rough, so I only flew over once, but your father has a deep wrinkle between his eyebrows now. I couldn’t talk to him directly, but I showed myself and nodded in response to his questions, and he broke down in tears.”

Ah...father... I’m sorry for worrying you...

“Sere, Isaac understands everything. You’ll see him again.” Lou patted my head.

“The Granzeus cakes were as good as ever!”

“Asu, you little...!” growled Lou.

Give me back my serious mood!

“Also, happy birthday, Sere,” Asu congratulated me.

“Oh, did you mean to come today in particular?” Lou asked suspiciously.

“Thank you, Asu!”

Asu flew onto my lap and kissed my cheek. A gentle heat, like a hot spring, radiated all the way to my fingertips. It was his magic!

“Asu! You don’t mind transferring magic to me?”

“It’s because we’re friends. It’s my present to you. Also, I can find you more easily in the future now.”

“You shouldn’t go around giving other people magic when you’re a servant...” Lou sighed. “I guess if it’s Sere, Gillain wouldn’t mind.”

“The balance was off with only Lou and Miyu’s magic.”

No, if anything, it’s too heavy to have magic from three holy beasts!

“You just didn’t want to be left out, did you, Asu?” Lou asked.

“No comment.”

“Did you come today to pick up Sere on her sixteenth birthday?” Lou raised his right eyebrow.

“Gillain’s perfectly capable of coming to collect his own bride. He’ll come on his own time.”

“Wait, Gillain still wants to marry me?”

We hadn’t met in two years. Two years was...a long time. Things had changed too. I didn’t think there was much value in a woman who has people after her life and might not be alive in a year.

“Sere, however you look at it, I feel sorry for Gillain.”

“I mean...”

In the novel, I had been engaged to Prince Gardner. He had abandoned me despite saying for ten years after our engagement that he would treasure me. My faint love was trampled on. It sunk in that I wasn’t needed as a woman.

There had been many times in this life when I thought a man was trying to get close to me, but in the end, I was sure they wouldn’t choose me. They would throw me cold glances as easily as a flip of the palm. I knew I would never be loved as a woman, so whenever I had those thoughts, I laughed at myself and brought my thoughts back down to earth.

I’d tried very hard not to expect anything of that nature from Gillain, although I was loyal to him. I warned myself that his feelings for me were those of a comrade or a battle partner, not those of a lover, so it would hurt less when he

betrayed me.

Gillain was my savior, and I wanted him to stay my savior. Lovers, engagement, marriage—if I were to dream of such things with him and then have my expectations betrayed, I would die before I could be condemned.

“Don’t you have faith in Gillain?”

“I...don’t have faith in love.” I knew what it was like for everything that had been built up over the years to become meaningless in the end, for my lover to change his mind just like that and hate me.

“Can you believe in Gillain?”

I thought for a moment, then nodded quietly.

Asu chuckled. “That’s enough. Gillain is just like you. You can grow together.”

Asu smiled, promised to visit again, and flew away.

I clung to Lou, suddenly feeling anxious.



One afternoon, when the cold of winter had gradually begun to subside, Lou and I headed to the old castle on Tabuchi’s summons.

“I’m terribly sorry to make you come here when you’re so busy,” Tabuchi began.

“Hello!” I greeted him.

“It is an honor to see you, heavenly beast of the west.”

“Mhm,” Lou responded.

“I called you here today because I wanted to ask for your advice. We here in Marsche are finally beginning to see a path to a new system.”

“Wow, congratulations!” I replied.

“But before that, I want to revive the guilds.”

That makes sense. We need to gather people in order to rebuild, and guilds are essential to managing people fairly and honestly.

“I want advice from you two on that.”

“Can’t you use the people from the former guilds?” The reason Marsche’s guilds had fallen apart last time had been because of the royal family, not the guild members.

“I’m sure most of them were sincere workers, but there were some guild members in Tohkun Guild—which oversaw Marsche Guild—who were doing favors for the royal family. They leaked information about you.”

I see. The guild here was involved in that incident that I got wrapped up in.

“How about a three-pronged approach, then?” I suggested. “First, a paper test on general knowledge and calculations. Next, an interview with you, me, and Lou. Lastly, a general election to choose a guildmaster!” *We won’t make them buy a CD to vote for the guildmaster they stan, though.*

“That would be a lot more difficult than our past practices. I wonder if we can gather enough people...”

“I wouldn’t mind at all if you rejected the idea, but I think with that level of strictness, you could confidently announce to the world that Marsche Guild has been reborn.”

“That makes sense.”

“To be completely honest, whether or not you can gather people depends on one thing: money! You’ll attract plenty of people as long as they can have a steady income.”

“Ahh, I hoped you wouldn’t say that. We don’t have very much capital at the moment, as you can imagine. I’d like to ask them to work hard for the sake of reconstruction for the time being, but that’s just idealistic thinking.”

Yes, it is! You’re just about the only one who would work yourself into dust and give yourself dark circles over an ideal.

I chanted *Appraisal!* in my heart. Tabuchi glowed blue.

“That’s a convenient new technique, Sere,” Lou commented. “Tell me all about it later.”

Tabuchi (Leader of the new government, former Prime

Minister of the Kingdom of Marsche, Prime Minister of the provisional government)

Status: Chronically fatigued, sleep deprived, on the verge of death by overwork

Skills: Earth magic, fire magic, world-weary

He has "world-weary" in his skills... I felt a bit like crying.

"Well, all right then. I'll help you out!" I took a brown sphere out of my Magic Room.

"Sere?" Lou wasn't sure what I was doing.

"My brother Larouza Granzeus is well known as an explorer and collector of secret books. He dug this ten thousand-year-old fossil out of an iceberg! It's the only one in the world!"

"Is that...?" Realization set in to Lou's features.

"It's in good condition, and if you knock on it, it gives off an ancient scent!"

Lou was visibly alarmed. "No, I don't think you should sniff that!"

"Let's put this up for auction and use the profit to fund the guild!"

"No way you can sell that!" Lou exclaimed.

"Don't worry, Lou! There are fanatics in every place and age. Just watch!"

The next day, it sold for two hundred million gold!

We attracted about four thousand people using deceptive flyers that said things like "Recruiting guild members nationwide!" "Salary guaranteed for one year!" "Pay based on work from your second year on!" "Newcomers, come on and become heroes!"

As I had suggested, the first thing we did was give a paper test, narrowing it down to a hundred people. Today, we were going to use interviews to narrow it further to just fifty. We planned to start by setting up five guilds in Marsche with ten members each. We would then elect five guildmasters.

The applicants came up to me, Lou, and Tabuchi in order and sold themselves to us.

“Interviewee number one, come up!” The person managing the proceedings was of course Tabuchi’s eternal servant, Yamada.

A shrewd-looking middle-aged man came up and started a long spiel about how he was highly experienced as a guild worker.

“This guy has a dark side, Sere,” warned Lou. “He preys on fledgling adventurers.”

Clang! I rang the bell to end the interview.

“Thank you for your time. Interviewee number two, come up!”

Tabuchi was overjoyed. “We’re making such fast progress thanks to the holy beast!”

Number two was a young man with a side part. He told us that he was a former civil servant and skilled in math.

“He’s killed somebody,” Lou said. “Over something small.”

Clang!

“This isn’t a good sign,” I said. “Does this country only have this kind of person?”

“The wise have long left this country...” Tabuchi was nearly crying.

“S-Sorry, I shouldn’t have said that so early on! Yamada! Let’s move on to the next one!”

“Okay, interviewee number three, come up.”

We proceeded to efficiently sort through the candidates based on their interviews, Lou’s judgment, and my appraisal. They had all passed the written test, so we hired them as long as they were otherwise normal.

“Interviewee number seventy-four, come up!”

A hunched-over old lady entered. Yamada rushed over to help her.

“Hmm. This one has potential, despite being worn down,” said Lou.

Her interview had no issues, but age is age... I wasn't sure just yet.

Appraisal! She shone blue.

Gengoro (Former A-rank adventurer, Francis of Purgatory)

Status: Decreased stamina due to old age, disguised as a woman

Skills: Fire magic, acupuncture, disguise, frugality

Frugality under skills... That takes a certain amount of hardship to get...

"I don't even know where to start..." said Lou.

Clang, clang, clang! I rang the bell three times. "Okay, Francis, you can come wait over here!"

As Yamada guided Francis to his place, a scary-faced man pushed his way up to the interview desk. "Wait a minute! How come this old hag gets in and we don't?!" He was the only one making a fuss about it, but many of the other rejected candidates were also glaring our way and nodding. "I don't know what you are to the prime minister, but I won't let the likes of you decide who passes and fails!"

"Yeah! What he said!" another man shouted from the crowd.

I could see how it was irritating to put your success in the hands of a little girl, but that attitude disqualified him as a guild member. I stood up.

Tabuchi sighed. "Just try not to do too much damage to the building."

I shot Tabuchi a quick glare and flicked a finger into the forehead of the man, who was leaning in threateningly. *Bam!* He flew across the room, straight into the wall.

"I can definitely decide who's strong or weak, regardless of who passes or fails."

"Ahhhhh!" Some of the other men screamed.

"Have you heard this story?" I asked. "Once, there was a country that

collapsed all because they crossed one fourteen-year-old adventurer girl.”

“Th-The legend of the Twilight Lady of Destruction!”

The legend?

“Well, apart from that, there was also a town on a small island where a man who had been taking advantage of others crossed a fifteen-year-old adventurer. He met his demise, and the town had to start over from scratch.”

“Th-The legend of the Lady of Typhoons and Twilight!”

“What? I haven’t heard that one! Tell me!” Tabuchi leaned in excitedly.

One of the rejected candidates nervously began to speak. “There was a scummy adventurer named Bacas on Regan Island in the north. He had the island under his thumb. Nobody was strong enough to stand up to Bacas, who would go after your wife and children if you disobeyed him. When the whole town was at his mercy, an adventurer dropped by and struck back! He wasn’t able to recover. The town was finally freed from his curse. That adventurer who stopped him came to be known as the Lady of Typhoons and Twilight! She was like a storm!”

“Wow...” Tabuchi and Lou both gasped.

Stop watching so intently, you two! I didn’t know Regan Island was in that state, though...

“Ah-Ahem! My point is, people who judge by appearances are not fit to be guild members! Would anybody else like their forehead flicked?”

Ahh, they finally shut up. “Let’s continue, Yamada.”

“Well, then, moving on! Interviewee number 75, come up!”

“Hello! I’m Yoko. I run an inn in Tohkun!”

“Mrs. Yoko? Why are you here?”

“Well, I act as the receptionist for your requests, Fio. Couldn’t this be an extension of that job?”

She was right. *Clang, clang, clang!*

We held an election for the fifty people that we chose, and five new

guildmasters were chosen. Yoko was one of them, so our inn was now the third guild in Tohkun. Convenient!

“Hey! Typhoon girl!” called Lou.

You know, Lou...I have limits too...

Intermission: Boys' Night! Marsche Edition

The boys chattered excitedly.

"Order, order! Without further ado, let us begin the third meeting of the Watching Over Fio in the Cafeteria Committee!"

There was a sound like a gavel banging, followed by a couple blows of a whistle.

"Once again, your moderator today will be me, Fio's number one self-appointed guard and Tohkun guild member, Yashiro!"

"Screw you! I'm Fio's number one self-appointed guard!"

"You quit as an adventurer to work at the guild, and now you're trying to sneak into Fio's boarding house! That's not fair!"

"Okay, settle down. The early bird gets the worm," Yashiro chided them. "On to today's topic. How should we treat Fio now that she's stopped dressing as a boy? Please raise your hand if you have any input."

"What do you mean, stopped dressing as a boy?"

"Did you seriously think Fio was a boy?"

"Of course not! I just want to know why she stopped that adorable boyish way of speaking!"

"Fio always had that silver snake with her, right? She stopped dressing as a boy at the same time as the snake disappeared."

"Is that pretty little snake responsible for this? Where did it go?!"

"I'm not a worker here, but can I say something?"

"Oh, if it isn't Guildmaster Gan from Regan Island!" Yashiro replied. "Do you know something?"

"First of all, I owe that gorgeous silver snake a lot," Gan began. "She swallowed a giant octopus that had been terrorizing Regan Island and became

the ruler of the eastern sea.”

“Wow!” a feminine voice chimed in. “That snake was the legendary ruler of the eastern sea who protects our local ocean?”

“Exactly, Guildmaster Yoko. Miss Gold said the snake left on a journey, right? I’m sure she’s gone to conquer the entire ocean.”

“Amazing!”

“How manly!”

“A man among men!”

“Also, the reason Miss Gold was dressing as a boy is because our former guildmaster told her to change her appearance so people don’t patronize her for being cute,” Gan explained. “Her hair went to her hips at the time, but she cut it all off right there, which only made her cuter... The guildmaster was disappointed. He regretted telling her that after the fact.”

“That was a bad idea. She’s Fio, so she’d be cute no matter what she did.”

“I came over to the short-hair side after seeing Fio’s messy short cut.”

“But her new bob is cute too, right?”

“Oh, I guess she grew her hair out because she stopped dressing as a boy.”

“Why?”

“Why?”

“May I say something?”

“Mr. Tabuchi!” several men exclaimed.

“Sereph— I mean, Fio now has someone close to her protecting her. She no longer has to put in so much effort, so she’s returned to being a lovely girl.”

“Someone close to her? Who’s that? The snake again?”

“A b-boyfriend?”

“No way!”

“Could it be the saint?” Yamada asked.

“Yamada! Who’s the saint?”

“Apparently, the saint that visited Marsche was a former classmate of Fio’s. It was a beautiful sight to see them together...”

“What?! How come you get to see all the good stuff?! No fair!”

“Prime Minister! How come you give Yamada all the responsibilities?!”

“This is favoritism!”

“Hey, now, it just so happens that people who help with my work get more opportunities,” Tabuchi fired back. “If you’re jealous of Yamada, then step forward and help with the Riceball Revolution!”

“Oh, that makes sense!”

“I’ll help!”

“Me too!” exclaimed several men in chorus.

Yashiro regained the floor. “So, now that we know that Fio didn’t stop dressing as a boy because something bad happened, can we all agree to continue to talk to and dote on her as we have been, but not try to outdo each other?”

“No objections!” everyone responded.

“As usual, only those who participated in last week’s lottery will be allowed to buy her food.”

“No objections!”

“On to the next topic, then. Tabuchi is joining us today to discuss this. You can go ahead.”

“Thank you. Sakaki, I heard directly from Fio that you had her bake a matcha cake to boost everyone’s morale, but I don’t remember eating one.”

“Uh oh!”

“I didn’t get any!”

“Hey, Sakaki! Explain yourself!”

“You’re keeping them all to yourself?! Unbelievable!”

“I thought better of you, Sakaki!”

“I-I can explain! Ahhh!”

“Okay, free discussion begins now. Anyone who has something to say, go ahead.”

“I do!”

“Ah, Komatsu from the meat store. Go ahead.”

“So, uh, Fio always hunts huge, fierce animals for me, and she brings them to me frozen whole, and that Regan Islander just called her Miss Gold... Do you think...?”

“Oh, Mr. Tabuchi, do you know?”

“Yes... Fio is an A-rank adventurer.”

The room burst into a clamor.

“I had a gold ranker look for my lost cat?!”

“I commissioned her to shell some peas the other day...”

“Cute, strong, but with a sorrowful side... Too adorable...”

“Now, this is a shocking fact! But we’re running out of time, so if anyone has something else to say, go ahead!”

“I do!”

“Akimoto from the book store, go ahead.”

“Um, so, I’ve been working on a book based on Fio with some other people from the bookstore at our own expense, and it’s finally published! It’s called *Wish of the Maiden in Boy’s Clothing*. It’s a coming-of-age fantasy about a girl who works hard disguised as a boy during the day, but when night comes, she takes off her disguise and wishes to see her estranged family again. She works to make her dream come true while bringing happiness to those around her. It has illustrations in a soft watercolor style by my friend Noda...”

“H-Hey!”

“Oh, Sakaki? I thought you’d been defeated already. You’re back?”

“Y-You can’t... You’ll be killed if you publish that... Hey, how many did you print? How much is it?”

“U-Uh, two hundred copies, and a thousand gold per book.”

“I’ll take them all!”

“Huh? You haven’t learned your lesson, Sakaki?”

“You’re buying them all for yourself again?! You jerk!”

“Punish him!”

“Graaaaah!”

The room dissolved into turmoil.

“Have things...been generally peaceful while I was away?” Lou tilted his head as he lay in Serephione’s bed on the second floor while she slept.

Chapter 8: Reunion with Gillain

It was a chaotic time for the guilds as they started up, as staff members floundered and acts of sabotage sometimes halted progress, but after two months, the guilds began to take off. Whether or not they would be recognized by adventurers and guilds in other countries would depend on their sincere work in the future.

I made the staff of the Third Tohkun Guild swear secrecy before I showed them my plate.

“You’re not just a gold, you’re a Trundle?!” shouted Yashiro, a guild worker who was a former C-rank adventurer. “I thought I’d made progress with my love, but...the hurdle is just getting higher...”

“I didn’t know you were so skilled... I guess I had no need to worry about you.” Mrs. Yoko forced a smile. She seemed to know what Trundle meant, being well versed in the business world.

“What’s that? Is it good?” asked a woman named Junko. She was pretty in a seductive way, so by appearances you might think she was trying to grab people’s attention, but she was an earnest, hardworking woman at heart. Apparently, she had been rejected from jobs in the past because of her looks despite genuinely wanting to work. *Junko, you should open a tavern where legendary heroes can gather as part of your guild duties!*

These three were the main staff in the afternoon, when I normally came and went.

I was no longer undercover, so I could accept missions from the guild in the open and have them reflected in my career as Serephione G. If I didn’t have some amount of experience, accomplishments, and commission stats recorded, then I wouldn’t be eligible for the next promotion test.

I was finally going for S-rank. I couldn’t have my gold plate next to my father’s platinum chain and Gillain’s platinum plate forever!

I'm gonna level up into an S-ranker with Lou as soon as I can!



As I spent my days completing requests from the guild with Lou, working hard to master scalding sand, and baking cakes, the sun gradually became warmer and warmer, soft-colored flowers began to bloom, and the trees took on a dazzling new green. It was early summer.

An invitation arrived from Tabuchi along with a refreshing breeze. It read, "The new government will finally be inaugurated this weekend. It's going to be under the umbrella of some big country, but it'll have some autonomy. I want you to come to the signing ceremony and party."

"I don't get it. What does the big country get out of this?" Lou asked.

"Maybe the big country wants to take in a country's worth of people, govern them according to their own will, and then have their help paid back with interest when the economy stabilizes? Or maybe the big country just wants to have a military alliance? Kind of like, 'Come to our side if there's a war! Give us soldiers!'" Numbers were power in this world, excluding irregulars like me.

"What country is it, even?"

"They're keeping it quiet until the last minute because they don't want a riot to break out. Also, Tabuchi got full powers in the referendum the other day. Marsche doesn't have any iron ore right now, so maybe it's somewhere like Dembre or Gunslair in the west of the continent."

"Huh... So, do you want to go to the party?"

"No way. I'm the one who destroyed Marsche. I'm not interested anyway." It didn't have anything to do with me.

"Want to sneak away during the commotion this weekend and see how Miyu's training has been going?"

"Yay! Sounds great!"

I'd informed Tabuchi of my upcoming absence through the guild and was busy making a snakeberry tart for Miyu when Sakaki came running into the kitchen

with an unusual expression.

“Fio! Please! Come to the signing ceremony!”

“Huh? Why? It’s a milestone for the people of Marsche, not me.”

“What are you saying?! We only made it to this day thanks to you! Who was it that consulted with the Prime Minister, eradicated the bandits before they could form a clique, used incomprehensible magic to repeatedly transport ten carts worth of goods, and helped establish the guild?! It was you!”

“Sere, you’ve been working for free again?” asked Lou. “You’ve always been such a people-pleaser...”

“Only you, Tabuchi, and Yamada know that,” I explained to Sakaki. “Nobody would know who I was unless you told them. And I’m in hiding! There’s no way I can go anywhere high-profile. I can’t go to a signing ceremony, a party, or any of those other glamorous gatherings of world leaders!”

“This is bad... Fio, at least don’t leave Tohkun during the celebration days. We need you to pray for our new beginning to go smoothly!”

“Shouldn’t you ask the saint for that?”

“Are you *trying* to kill me?!”

“*You’re* the one who’s upset?!”

“S-Sere, I don’t get what’s going on, but let’s stay here for the next few days,” said Lou. “Sakaki looked like he was about to die for a second there.”

“What?!”

Is everyone going to just be freaking out until the signing ceremony is over?

We decided to hole up in the inn over the weekend instead of going to visit Miyu.

It was the day of the signing ceremony, and the town was alive, almost like there was some kind of festival going on.

The people may not have been proud to surrender to a larger country, but they were also tired of being in limbo. Most people were relieved to finally be

able to build a new nation under a stable country. For now, they just wanted to become a country where everybody could work and not starve.

Cheers rose up from outside the window. It seemed the delegation had finally arrived.

Lou and I poked our faces out of the window. It reminded me of the Liberation Day parade from about two years prior. It had been funny seeing Sakaki's face when I shot the magic needle at him.

The sound of the hooves of dozens of horses echoed from afar. Were they showing off their superior military power by arriving on horses? The leader of the group finally came into view, waving their battle flag.

"No way..."

The crest was in gold on a red background, depicting Asu—I had thought of it as an eagle before—and a lion facing each other.

I had fought under this emblem in the book. There was no way I could mistake it.

"It's Galé..."

"Galé?!"

I instinctively clutched my plates over my clothes.

The Galé troops continued to run down the main street without dropping speed. The townspeople cheered at their disciplined movements.

A man at the back of the procession entered my view. He was on an especially large black horse, and he was wearing a black military uniform. It was clear to see that he was particularly important.

"The emperor himself came..." Lou glanced my way as if to check my reaction, but I wasn't in any state to return his gaze.

No way... We're so far apart. Is it even possible for us to meet eyes?

Ah...he locked onto me.

Just then, Gillain vanished from my line of sight—and suddenly reappeared right before my eyes.

He closed the distance between us with one step and cupped my cheeks in both hands. His thumbs traced the outline of my face, and he ran a finger down the faint scar on my cheek.

“What’s this scar?” His voice was deep, relaxed, and pleasant.

“I...made a mistake.”

His slender fingers ran through my shoulder-length hair. “And your hair?”

“I cut it myself. I wasn’t hurt.”

There was a commotion outside due to the emperor suddenly vanishing. I heard the clamor, but it felt like it was in another world entirely as I gazed at Gillain before me.

In the two years since I’d last seen Gillain, his cheeks had hollowed out slightly, and his silver hair was now swept back to the nape of his neck. His blue eyes looked more worn out than cold. Gillain was now about the same age as I had been before my reincarnation. The young working generation was always putting in hard hours; being the emperor was, in a way, like working a high-stress job. We had one more thing in common.

“You look so tired, Gillain. Are you okay? Getting enough sleep?” I gently touched the scar I had healed on his face before and cast a charm on it.

“Ah... It’s been so long since the last time I saw you worry for me... You’re right. I am tired. It may not seem like it, but I really hurried to get here.”

“You did?”

“I hurried to give you the perfect reception.” Gillain’s arms circled my back, closing the distance between us.

“Gillain?”

My face pressed against his chest, and I looked up.

“Sere, it’s been ten years. It’s time.”

Like falling snow, his lips drifted gently onto mine. It was our second kiss, after the one we shared on that snowy night. His coffee-like magic circulated through my body. I met his eyes. They were more sincere and serious than ever before,

communicating an unmistakable warmth.

“You still want to marry me?” I asked.

“I’ve wanted you and you alone ever since I met you.”

That was the most direct proposal I’ve ever heard...

“One correction, though. I don’t just want to get engaged. I want to marry you and live with you. All I want for the rest of my life is to have you by my side.”

“Your whole life?”

“You don’t believe me? That’s okay. I won’t leave you, ever.” He squeezed me tight.

Does this feel so natural because I’ve gotten used to being surrounded by his magic?

“I was late. I don’t want to make you suffer like that ever again. I’m sorry I wasn’t able to keep my promise.”

I heard Gillain’s clumsy apology from above my head. He sounded as if he had shared that near-death moment with me. *You don’t have anything to apologize for...*

“You let Asu come to me,” I said. “I wouldn’t be here if not for that. You don’t have to apologize. Thank you, Gillain.” Just as Lou and Asu had taught me, I said thank you instead of sorry.

“Sere...” Gillain held me even closer.

Ka-chuk! The door burst open. I lifted my face from Gillain’s chest in shock to see Sakaki standing there in a military uniform.

“Your Imperial Majesty! I knew you’d be here... How impatient of you!”

“Quiet,” Gillain commanded. “You’re interrupting me.”

Gillain and Sakaki know each other...?

“Why are you in a Galé uniform?” I asked Sakaki.

Sakaki and Gillain exchanged glances, and Gillain nodded.

Sakaki sighed. "I'm from Galé, Lady Serephione. I infiltrated Marsche... Basically, I'm a spy."

"I have spies in every country," said Gillain, as if to brush it off.

Oh, so it's an ironclad rule...

"In the beginning, I was simply a spy to find out what was going on in the Kingdom of Marsche. But then things hit a turning point, the kingdom was overthrown, and I happened to meet you, so my role kept on changing. Now, I'm the coordinator between Prime Minister Tabuchi and Galé, as well as the informant on your condition."

What? Didn't Sakaki rise to the rank of troop leader in Marsche's army? And he was spying on the royal family for Tabuchi too, right? This is so messy... Doesn't this mean he's actually really good at what he does? Did he get recruited for successfully taking down the royal family? Or did he just get swept up in this?

"You knew I knew Gillain?"

"It was well-known that the emperor's lady was in Judore. He didn't hesitate to tell any women who tried to suck up to him that they couldn't outdo his lady and that they shouldn't be so conceited. I didn't know it was you until after the incident with Princess Tomoe, however. I'm really glad that I didn't leave any scars on your face. I could have been killed."

"You were telling Gillain about what I was doing here?"

"Well... He ordered me to, yes."

"So you stopped me this morning because..."

Sakaki scratched his cheek. "Yeah, basically. So, Your Imperial Majesty, you've had your tearful reunion now. We should get back to the signing ceremony."

"I'm not done here. Let's go, Sere." Gillain picked me up.

"W-Wait? Why? The ceremony? That has nothing to do with me!"

"I heard from Sakaki that there are some people making passes at you. I'll make it known that you're mine."

“Huh? That’s so embarrassing! I don’t want to go!”

“Give it up, Sere,” echoed a voice in my head. “He’ll treat you well.”

“Asu!”

When did you get here?!

“Hmm...” grumbled Lou.

“Lou?! Oh, come on, let me down already!”

I struggled with all my might, but Gillain descended the staircase after Sakaki, as if he were dealing with nothing more than a light breeze. *I’m supposed to be an A-ranker... Sniffle.*

“Fio!”

“Fio?!”

The people in the guild and cafeteria were abuzz when they saw me in the arms of an apparently strong man who had shown up out of nowhere. Gillain kissed me on the cheek as if to show off.

“Eeeeeee!” screamed multiple people. Including me. *Ah... Zero hit points...*

Gillain got on his black horse, still holding me, and covered me with his black cape on his lap. I was taken off to the old castle while still in a daze.

“Your Imperial Majesty, Lady Serephione, I never thought I would see two holy beasts at once with my very own eyes...” Tabuchi knelt before Lou and Asu and hung his head, dripping an impressive amount of sweat.

“I suppose this is our first time meeting. We don’t have much time, Prime Minister. Let’s begin at once.”

“Yes.”

Gillain tried to take me to the podium where the signing would be held while I was still in my pajamas. I managed to drag myself away and made it to a corner of the room, peering around to make sure I wasn’t in his line of sight.

Lou and Asu stayed by my side. They were giving off immense magical energy too! They usually hid their presences, so why?!

As I sat in the corner, awash in a powerful aura with Prime Minister Tabuchi kneeling in my direction, I felt like a ghost haunting the building. It hurt being looked at by everyone in the room like I was suspicious.

Oh, I understand... There are a lot of political influences from different countries at the historical signing ceremony of Marsche and Galé. They're protecting me so nobody with sinister motives approaches me.

"Thank you, Lou, Asu."

The signing ceremony proceeded solemnly. The content of the agreement was that Marsche would become a full vassal state of Galé. Tens of billions of gold in financial aid, interest-free loans for an indefinite period of time, the elimination of tariffs between the two countries, the development of resources in Marsche, and free passage... *Wait, what?*

"Is that...to come get me?"

"Yeah, he wanted to be able to come into the country without it looking unnatural. Now it'll be treated the same as traveling within the nation."

That's so heavy!

"He bought a whole country for you, Sere," Lou teased.

"Yes, it took a lot of effort," Asu explained. "It came down to Gillain's heavy lifting in the end."

"He must really love you!"

"Don't let it get to you, Sere," Asu reassured me. "It does have upsides for Galé."

He took a foreign country as a vassal just to pick me up... Maybe I really am loved?

Applause rang through the building. I looked up to see Gillain and Tabuchi shaking hands. *Th-This is a win-win in the end, right? That's good... No, don't come straight for me!*

Gillain stopped in front of me, took my hand, and kissed the back of it. I activated my long-neglected skill as the daughter of a count and smiled gracefully.

“Thank you for protecting my beloved fiancée, Tabuchi.”

The crowd went wild hearing what Gillain said!

“Oh, no, I enjoyed spending time with your lovely Serephione,” Tabuchi said, as if I weren’t right there. *Wait, why are you revealing my name?!*

Gillain put his arms around my shoulders and kissed my temple. “This is the perfect time for an introduction. Everybody, this is my beloved Serephione Granzeus, daughter of Count Granzeus. Serephione was attacked by bandits in her home country of Judore due to her exceptional qualities, and she has been in hiding under the protection of Prime Minister Tabuchi. We are finally ready to welcome her in Galé. Could I ask for your blessing on our engagement and eternal love?” Gillain glared intimidatingly into the audience.

“Congratulations on your engagement, Emperor Gillain and Lady Serephione!”

“Congratulations!”

“Hooray for engagements!”

“Hooray!” everyone cheered.

Gillain smiled as wide as he could and raised the hand that wasn’t around me to the audience.

“Asu...I’m completely lost. What’s going on?”

“Your time in hiding is over now. The time is right, Sere. You’re going public.”

I wish someone would have told me this before the fact...

“Sere! Hey! Come back to earth!”

Gillain held me tight around the waist so that I couldn’t get away, so I gave my best countess smile to the big shots who looked at us.

“Your fiancée is very lovely, Your Imperial Majesty, but...I can’t help but notice how terribly *young* she is.”

Well said, Adversary A! Yes, we have a ten-year age gap!

“Thank you for your concern,” responded Gillain. “It is true that Serephione is young, but she is not at all frivolous, since her life has been threatened many

times. I feel sad for her. I won't let anyone hurt ever again, though." His eyes glinted. The first hero left the scene.

"Congratulations on your engagement! However, given that you are an emperor, in terms of status, don't you think the daughter of a foreign count... I mean, having a lovely girl at your side is one thing, but our nation needs a queen who can maintain order." He looked me up and down in evaluation.

Oh, well said, Adversary B! You're right, an emperor should marry a princess, or the daughter of a marquis at the very least. Definitely not a house ghost in pajamas!

"Thank you for your concern. It's true that Serephione is the daughter of a count, but I don't consider status to be an issue. Her maternal grandmother happens to be a Trundle. The family is very well-educated and has garnered respect worldwide. I don't suppose you've heard of them?"

"The war gods of Judore...!"

Why not the gods of wisdom or something? The second hero left the scene.

"Congratulations, Your Imperial Majesty. However, she seems like such a delicate young lady... Will she do well as the empress of Galé? Will she be able to hold the nation together if you go out into battle?"

Well said, Adversary C. Of course the people won't support a random girl from another country!

"Thank you for your concern. My Serephione is powerless, as you can see, but that just means I will have to pay all the more attention to internal affairs when I am absent. Do you think I will let Galé have a weak point? I don't intend to have my subjects pay deference to Serephione in the first place. She's mine alone."

The last hero left the scene. Now that he was done being publicly shamed, Gillain left to go see Tabuchi. I was finally able to take a breath and go out to the balcony with something to drink. Lou and Asu came with me.

"Asu, care to explain?" I asked.

"You must have gotten most of the idea by now," he responded. "With the

protection that comes with being Gillain's fiancée, you're safe to present to the world as yourself. To attack you would be to attack Gillain and Galé. As long as you're with Gillain, you have no need to hide. You can contact the Granzeuses too. I don't think you should go back to Judore just yet, though."

"I wonder what Schneider will do when word of this reaches Judore. Maybe he'll send an assassin to Galé," Lou hypothesized.

"Galé may be a mess internally, but it's merciless to outsiders. An unfamiliar face won't be able to hide here so easily."

Both Prince Schneider and I are going to have to shift from static to dynamic...

"I can't believe how big this engagement announcement was, though..." I said. "I feel bad about causing trouble for Gillain."

"You didn't cause any trouble, Sere," said Asu. "He was going to come for you one way or another. He just also happened to take care of some other issues at the same time. Don't look so down."

"Lady Serephione, do you even understand how much trouble you've caused for our nation?" someone said. I looked up from Asu to see a tall, blond man in a Galéan military uniform. He looked slightly older than me.

"Um, how do you do?"

"I can't believe His Imperial Majesty has gone to such lengths for *you*, of all people." The handsome man glared at me from above. *Is Galé full of beautiful people too?* I mentally sighed.

"Who's he?" I asked Asu in a whisper.

"Gillain's aide."

Appraisal!

He shone blue.

Arthur Nirva (Aide to the Emperor of Galé, former aide to the First Prince, heir of a marquis, S-rank adventurer)

Status: Tired, irritated

Skills: Wind magic, one-handed sword, hatchet

Well, he doesn't seem like a bad person, but what is Gillain thinking by employing someone who was helping his enemy, the first prince?

"He's not thinking anything, Sere," Asu answered my thoughts. "He's not interested in minor details like that."

"It's nice to meet you, sir," I greeted Arthur. "My name is Serephione Granzeus. I'm terribly sorry for the trouble I've caused Emperor Gillain."

"Galé didn't need this random country..." grumbled Arthur. "What about you clouded his judgment?"

Hmm, I guess he's neither a friend nor an enemy to Gillain.

"I don't mean any offense by this, but do you think Gillain's judgment is ever clouded?"

"How dare you call our emperor by his first name without a title, little girl!" he barked.



So he's not necessarily an ally, but he respects Gillain as the head of state...
"Asu, what should I do in terms of Galéan etiquette? Ignore him? Apologize? Cry?" I asked again, too quietly for Arthur to hear.

"Beat him up!"

"I didn't ask you, Lou!"

Just then, an older man with white hair and well-groomed, stylish facial hair started to make his way toward us from behind Arthur.

"That's the Prime Minister, Sere. Don't let your guard down."

That makes sense. He was wearing an expensive-looking suit instead of a military uniform, and on top of it, he wore a cape. He clearly wielded a great deal of magical and political power.

"Oh, I see we have the heavenly beast of the west here. I would expect nothing less from our emperor! He never misses. Arthur, kneel down!"

The prime minister knelt down, but not to me; he was kneeling to Asu and Lou. He could see them.

"It's nice to meet you. I am Regueid, Prime Minister of Galé. Congratulations on your engagement to Emperor Gillain."

Appraisal!

He shone blue.

Regueid Patridge (Prime Minister of Galé, marquis, tactician, S-rank adventurer)

Status: Good

Skills: Fire magic, water magic, wind magic, earth magic, tactics

All four kinds of magic and tactics... I'll have to bring this up with my grandmother later. I curtsied, although it wasn't very good since I wasn't in a gown. "It's an honor to make your acquaintance."

“Prime Minister!” Arthur shouted. “Please stand up! What’s going on?!”

“Don’t you understand her power?! You’re not even close to her level!”

Well, my A-rank is equal to S, so I’m the same as Arthur... Wait, is he going off Lou’s power?

“Daughters of counts are a dime a dozen in Galé. She’d be nothing without the Trundles behind her.”

Hey, I have the Granzeuses behind me too!

Asu chuckled. “Look what they have to say about you, Sere.”

“He needs to learn some manners!” grumbled Lou.

“I see...” said Regueid. “Miss, could you teach this hard-headed man a lesson?”

“Hm?”

He brought out a small table. *Is he going to do the classic party trick where he pulls the tablecloth off? Oh...nope. Another test of strength...*

“Ready, go!”

Bam! One shot!

“It can’t be...” Arthur had lost both the argument and the contest not to cry first. He sank to the ground helplessly, still clutching my hand.

“Hey. Hands off.” Gillain, who I hadn’t realized was back already, swatted Arthur’s hand away.

“You really do have a discerning eye,” Regueid said to him. “I wondered what you were up to when you propositioned a little girl while you were studying abroad, but...now Galé has not one, but two holy beasts. This is wonderful!”

We actually have three, including Miyu. I felt gloomy seeing that they were blatantly being treated like weapons, though.

Instantly, Lou was in front of me, directly intimidating Regueid.

Regueid folded under the pressure and fell to his knees, yet his eyes were still glittering. “Amazing!”

“The western beast will have no mercy on anyone who hurts Serephone,” Gillain warned. “Remember that for your own sake.”

“Yes, I understand.” Regueid grinned. *I don't feel like I can trust him.*

“We’re done, Sere,” said Gillain. “Let’s go.” He took my hand and led me away. Lou and Asu followed us out of the old castle.



Gillain’s black horse took us to a rectangular building on high ground.

The room we were ushered into was an unexpectedly cozy space with lots of wood. Gillain had ordered everyone else to leave, so it was just us and the fluffballs. The window overlooked the city of Tohkun.

“What is this place?” I asked.

“This is where the emperor officially lives,” Gillain replied. “It was originally a battle fort, so the building isn’t decorated.”

Oh, so this is the place where they would have demolished Tohkun from if it had come to it...

“Would you like some tea?” I asked Gillain.

“You’d make some for me?”

“I want to relax a bit.”

I took my tea set out of my Magic Room as usual and made some of my best tea. Even I had a sense of pride, after all. I got the water boiling right away with a combination of water and heat magic, and I put the tea in to steep just as my grandmother had taught me.

Gillain was sitting on the sofa, legs crossed, watching me intently. I brought out an apple cake, cut it into eight pieces, and gave myself and Gillain one slice each, then three each to Lou and Asu.

“Enjoy!”

“You don’t have to entertain these guys!” complained Lou.

“You’ve improved, Sere,” said Asu. “This is great. And this is your first time having her cooking, right, Gillain?”

Gillain picked up a small piece and popped it into his mouth. I watched the three of them eat, then I picked up my cup and looked out the window, satisfied that they liked it.

It was dark outside now, and the stars had come out.

“It actually isn’t my first time.”

“What?”

“Eating your cooking, I mean.”

When? I can’t recall anything.

“I had a green cake that you made. I was worried since it was the same color as grass, but when I tried it, I really liked it. It was bittersweet.”

“You mean matcha?! Is that the one I gave Sakaki?!” *Sakaki was protecting him even back then...*

“He brought it since he saw I’d been forgetting to eat. He figured it was something even I would eat.”

So Sakaki worries for Gillain... I’m glad.

“Why didn’t you tell me that you two were connected?”

“I couldn’t act. Asu hadn’t returned yet, so there was nothing I could do. I didn’t want to make you happy only to let you down later.”

“I would have felt better if you’d just contacted me.”

“That’s exactly what I wanted to avoid. What would contacting you have accomplished? If I didn’t have the ability to save you, I would have just given you false hope.”

“Well, that may be true, but...”

“I’m an emperor. I don’t make promises I’m not sure I can keep.”

I was lonely, I almost said, but stopped myself. Gillain had been the one who was really alone during that time.

“Did you like the cake?” I blatantly changed the subject.

“I loved it. I can’t believe I’m able to put something in my mouth without

checking it for poison for once.”

We have the Poisoning Victims Alliance here...

“I wish I could have your cakes every day.”

“I’ll make as many as you want, as long as you promise not to skip meals.”

“What?!” Lou exclaimed.

“Read the room!” Asu scolded him.

The mood softened thanks to my silly fluffball.

“I’m sorry you had to announce our engagement to get me out of Marsche.”

“Do you...not want to be engaged?”

“It’s not like that, I just feel bad...”

“I thought I made it clear how I feel this afternoon.”

“I see...”

“It’s okay if you don’t believe I feel that way. You can just use me to get out of your current situation if that’s what you want.”

I believe you feel that way. I’ve understood completely, ever since you gave me your plate. I shook my head.

“Your feelings are what matters here. If you’d rather die than marry me, I’ll break off the engagement.”

“What do you mean, ‘rather die’...?!”

“If you hate me, then I’ll find some other way to protect you.”

Hate Gillain? No, I don’t...

“I’ve waited for ten years. You can reject me if you don’t want this. I’d accept my loss then.”

He’s wanted me for ten years, and I just ignored him and ran away from him the whole time.

“Your happiness is everything to me. I don’t want to force you into anything.

I'll leave right now if that's what you want. Asu can support you." Gillain always meant what he said.

Gillain would leave? The one person who I can fully trust not to lie to me ever since the events of the book?

"No! Please don't leave! Don't...abandon me..." I couldn't help but run up to Gillain and sit down before him, begging with my hands on his legs.

He opened his eyes wide in a rare expression of surprise, then placed a hand on my head. "You're my one and only, Sere. How could I ever abandon you?"

"Didn't Asu tell you? The book of prophecy says that everyone will betray me when I'm seventeen! Everyone I love will hate me!"

"I've heard. But I'm not included, right?"

"You're not, but that's exactly why...if I lost you, I wouldn't be able to go on living..." I suddenly had trouble breathing—hyperventilating? I clutched my chest.

"Sere!" Lou shouted.

"Gillain!" Asu shouted.

Gillain leaned forward, still sitting on the couch, put his hands on my sides, and lifted me onto his lap. I buried my face in his chest and took deep breaths, clutching the fabric of his clothes. He stroked my back gently, as if he were touching something fragile.

Once darkness had filled the room, I had become used to being in Gillain's room, and my breathing was gradually settling down. Asu permeated the air with his warm magic. Breathing it in made me feel better.

"Sere, that really worried me just now. *I'm* the one who wouldn't be able to go on living if I didn't have you. You're the only one who sees me as just another person. You know the same pain as me and see things from the same point of view as me. You don't hate me, do you? I really believe you don't..."

Gillain trusted me so deeply, it almost hurt. I couldn't go on hiding my feelings—not anymore.

"Gillain... My loyalty, past, present, and future, is to you alone. But, I'm

scared...”

Will you still love me in the future?

“I’m not going to betray you. Time will make that clear to you. You can wait patiently at my side until that time comes.”

I want to believe in a future where I stand close to Gillain so he won’t be lonely. I’ll be next to him, not anybody else.

“Will you marry me, my frightened Sere?”

I couldn’t resist. To live for someone who *wanted* me from the bottom of their heart was my dream...a dream I had turned my back on for so long.

I saw Lou and Asu in my field of vision. Loudarylphena, my other half, watched me with his sky-blue eyes. They inspired courage in me—the courage to take the next step.

I want to believe...

I met eyes with Gillain and nodded slightly, my chin trembling.

I...loved Gillain. I didn’t know if it was romantic, platonic, or familial love, but I didn’t care. My only thought was...*I want to make him happy.*

Gillain took out a ring with a vivid blue gem that matched his eyes perfectly—probably tanzanite—and slid it onto my left ring finger. I felt his intense magic inside it. As he put it on me, he kissed me.

“I love you.”

I’d fallen for him, just like in the book. I didn’t regret it, just like in the book.

Having put a conclusion to the thing that had been eating away at me for all this time, I let myself relax, lean against Gillain’s chest, and gaze at the sky.

A star fell.

Chapter 9: Return from Overseas

The day after the signing ceremony, Lou and I left Marsche in a hurry along with Gillain.

I hadn't even had a chance to explain what was going on to Tabuchi, Yamada, and Yoko, but I knew Tabuchi would give them a good explanation. I'd have to write a letter when I got the chance.

We left from the harbor in Marsche and headed to the continent of Celt on a large Galéan military ship. The waves were high, maybe because of a low pressure system coming in, and I was feeling seasick.

"This is when you ask Miyu for help!" suggested Lou.

"Miyu, help me!" I shouted. "Calm the sea! Our sails are going to break!"

The sea became calm amidst the pitch-black clouds.

"I'm impressed," said Lou.

"She is the ruler of the eastern sea, after all!"

"Oh, I see Lady Serephione can even control the weather! Lovely."

I turned around in surprise to see Regueid standing there, grinning. Behind him, numerous Galéan officials were staring at me, white in the face.

"Monsters marry monsters..."

I couldn't tell who had said that.

Monster... I'd been called that in the book. Lou growled, ready to jump down from my shoulder.

"It's okay, Lou. I'm honored to be compared to Gillain."

"Hey! Fio—I mean, Lady Serephione! His Imperial Majesty wants you!" Sakaki was waving at me from the cabin. I headed over to him with long strides.

Galé was located in the south of Celt. It took about two weeks to reach from the large harbor in the southeast of Marsche. Judore was located in the

midwest of the continent, bordering Galé.

This was my first time back home in about two years.

Welcome back, me.

We decided to stay in Galé until we had more information about Judore.

In the novel, I had been Gillain's mercenary, and now I was his fiancée. Did that difference constitute a departure from the plot of *Wild Rose*, or was it still within the bounds of the plot?

Lou had already left by this time in the book; I was left all alone in the cramped barracks. My days consisted of either fighting or staring at the wall from my bed, but my heart had long since gone numb, so I didn't even register loneliness. The only person I'd had to talk to was Gillain.

Now, I'd settled down in a detached palace a bit away from where Gillain lived in the middle of Galea, the capital city. Gillain had prepared a room in the imperial palace for me, but I turned it down because living in the palace would bother me. The detached palace had been neglected for a while, but I settled on it because Lou said its atmosphere was clearer than the others'.

The Galéan nobility wasn't jealous of me since I'd gone through so much pain. Gillain assigned Sakaki to be my guard since we knew each other, and Asu came every day to extort treats out of me. Regueid mentioned assigning me a lady-in-waiting, but I flatly refused, since I'd be too nervous wondering if she was a spy.

Galé's climate was pleasant—warmer than Judore's. The drafts didn't even bother me. In my detached palace, where we wouldn't attract attention, I covertly gathered materials with Lou, learned fire magic from Asu, cooked with ingredients that Sakaki brought me, and went back to Gillain at night to take care of everyone.

"Sere, what's this thick blue liquid?" Gillain asked.

"It's a smoothie I made with nutritious herbs I picked in the forest, anti-poison mushrooms, and banana. This is sure to take those dark circles away! Don't worry, I used Appraisal on it! I haven't tasted it, though!"

“A ‘smoothie’ ...?”

“This is your fiancée’s love for you, Gillain. Go for it!” Asu teased him.

“This is your responsibility to your fiancée, Gillain,” Lou piled on. “Don’t leave any in the cup!”

“Hm? Lou, Asu, you want some too? Here you go!” I offered.

“Uh...”

“Oh, and Sakaki? Here!”

“I, um...”

At times, when I couldn’t take Gillain’s dark circles away, I kissed his eyes as a charm, just like I used to do for my papa. I tried brushing my fingers over them instead to see if it would have the same effect, but I couldn’t change the charm, maybe because I’d already set it as a kiss. It was a little embarrassing, but you can’t make an omelet without breaking a few eggs... I couldn’t just let Gillain die of overwork!

“So? Have your eyes stopped feeling tired?”

“Yeah. Thank you.” He hugged me tightly, and his magic surrounded me. I felt like I might get addicted to coffee from the sheer strength of it.

“Ah, he’s marking you.” Asu snickered.

“What do you mean?”

“Anyone with magical talent will notice his magic on you and know not to touch you.”

“Hmm, but sometimes I get attacked in the woods.”

“Sorry,” Asu apologized. “Galé is big. Unfortunately, that means there are some idiots here.”

Soaking up both Gillain’s and Asu’s magic constantly, I felt like my own magic was being boosted. I felt just as protected as I did when I was in Judore. It made me a bit self-conscious.



“A party to showcase our engagement?”

“Yes. The emperor’s engagement is the biggest event in a nation. If we don’t give it the proper attention, other countries will look down on us. As a noble yourself, you should understand that I’m not saying anything out of the ordinary.” Regueid smiled as he drank the black tea that I’d made him when he visited my detached palace. Apparently, he wasn’t worried about poisoning as long as I made it.

“Gillain’s reform of Galé is still in progress. Shouldn’t we avoid spending money unless it’s absolutely necessary?”

“You can leave financial matters to me. Celebrations, if done well, can stimulate economic activity and turn a large profit.”

“Gillain isn’t a big fan of formalities in the first place. He especially hates flattery. Don’t you think this could backfire and damage our image to the people we invite?”

“That depends on your skill as the one who stands next to him. It could either raise or lower his reputation.”

Ugh, this guy! “Gillain, what do you think?” I asked Gillain, who was looking over some documents next to me.

“We don’t need to do it if you don’t want to.”

“Your Imperial Majesty, Lady Serephione is still only a name in the eyes of our subjects. If you don’t present her, you’ll get the same annoying insects flying around you as you have up to now. It would be better to declare her to be yours publicly. Those who understand her worth will understand.”

“Oh, Regueid, you understand too?”

“Of course!”

Very fishy. I doubt Regueid really thinks of me as much more than an add-on to Lou.

“If you plan to marry soon, you could skip the engagement announcement and just announce your wedding.”

“The wedding can wait. I’ve only just convinced her of my feelings. Don’t rush

it.”

Gillain had told me that he would wait until my mess (Schneider and Maribelle) was cleaned up, and also until after I had turned nineteen, to avoid the years when I was convicted and killed in the novel. He said to wait and see for myself that he wouldn’t betray me.

Ah... I want to be stronger.

We had no choice but to showcase our engagement, but I was bad at socializing due to having been raised as a shut-in. I didn’t think Gillain was particularly good at it either.

We as a couple...would just have to resort to force if the time came! *Bring it on, muscleheads!*

“Can you do hair styles, Sakaki?”

“Fio, hair styling isn’t part of a spy’s job description.”

“What about you, Asu?”

“Sere...this is the first time in my long life as a holy beast that I’ve been asked to style hair.”

“Darn it!”

“Sere! Why aren’t you asking me?” Lou demanded.

“You have paws.”

Lou scoffed.

“Fio, how can you just disrespect a holy beast like that...”

Sakaki still called me Fio when Gillain wasn’t around. He had also studied magic hard, maybe because he felt constrained by life in the detached palace, so he was able to see Lou and Asu now.

I had to dress up nice for the engagement party to avoid embarrassing Gillain. I didn’t have the time or means to make a gown, but fortunately, I had a new one in my Magic Room that my grandmother had made for me. She had given it to me in case of emergency, since a gown is a woman’s battle armor. It was only

later that I understood what my grandmother said and did; I was grateful to her.

The hem was designed to be easily extendable for when I grew in the future. It was a classic design, but it was still from a foreign country. I didn't know what I'd do if it stood out too much from the others, but I had no other option. I just had to put it on and stand strong.

I'd been trained in hair and makeup, but my hair was short now. It had finally grown out to shoulder-length, but it still wasn't long enough to tie up or braid. I figured I would ask someone else...but nobody in the detached palace could handle it.

"What if you called Elise?" Asu asked.

"I can't just call a saint to do my hair. Plus, she's a knight in the first place. She's not the best at that kind of thing."

"I guess birds of a feather flock together."

"We're from the same knight flock."

"Oh, well." Asu shone and grew from his miniature size to his true size, then plucked out one of his rainbow feathers. "You can put this in your hair."

That's...awesome!

"I can't just wear a holy beast's feather! That's national treasure tier!"

"You think? I can just grow a new one."

"Thank you, but...I don't think most people can even see it."

"I see... In that case... Here, now even Magicless people should be able to see it."

I held up the feather with both of my hands. It was like an otherworldly illusion. Sakaki and I made eye contact.

"Fio...you have to wear it now, or it's disrespecting the holy beast," Sakaki informed me. "I can't deny that it'll make you stand out too much, though."

"It also lets people know you have me protecting you," Asu said. "Two birds with one stone."

“Wear my fur too, Sere!” Lou chimed in.

Where? On my butt? There’s no need for a weird rivalry.

This is too much for my plain black hair...



I was ushered into the front room of the Imperial Palace’s largest audience hall, where I waited with Lou and Sakaki. The hall would be filled with influential nobles from Galé. I would be the last to enter—diving straight into unfamiliar territory.

“Sere, you look down. What’s wrong?” Lou set his paws on my lap and tilted his head.

Normally, I would have been escorted to Gillain by a male relative...

This engagement may have been irregular, but I was naturally serious about it. This was going to be the first and last engagement party in my life. If this engagement were to disappear...I would disappear with it.

It hurt not having family with me, even if I knew there was nothing I could do about it. I wondered if my father would agree with this engagement... I wondered if my grandmother would give Gillain a passing score.

Someone knocked on the door, and Arthur entered. He was escorting me in place of a male relative. Arthur was a marquis, so he was in no position to complain about the woman he was taking with him.

Arthur took one look at me, drew in a breath, and stopped in his tracks. His gaze wandered for a moment, then he gathered himself and made his way over to me. “You seem...subdued. Is something the matter?”

Where did your disrespectful attitude go? Is this like the arm wrestling effect?

“It’s nothing. I’m just...a little homesick.” I shook off my thoughts of my family and smiled weakly.

“Do you feel constrained in the detached palace?”

“Of course not! Everyone treats me well. Thank you for escorting me today. I don’t mean to be a bother, but I’d appreciate if you gave me instructions.”

“Sure.”

I gently put my hand around Arthur’s elbow. “Is there anything strange about my appearance? I haven’t had a chance to learn Galéan customs.”

“No, nothing’s wrong. I don’t see a single weak point on you today. If you’d been like this in Marsche, even I would have...” Arthur sighed.

“Arthur?”

“It’s nothing. The emperor is waiting.”

Arthur’s uniform was navy blue. It was decorated with ceremonial medals and aglets that hung from his chest.

My grandmother’s best dress was the clear light blue of Lou’s eyes. The skirt was not particularly full, and the silhouette was clean. Mrs. Marcus had embroidered the wrists, neckline, and hem in navy blue, toning down the bright sky blue to my liking. I was sixteen, so I wanted a more modest look with my gown.

“We’re wearing matching colors, Arthur.”

“That...may not be good.”

My grandmother had given me a lot of accessories, but all I had around my neck was my platinum chain. Other than that, I just had on Alma’s gold ring and my engagement ring. My short hair was forcibly gathered at the back, and I had carefully hidden the nape of my neck with Asu’s feather. It shone red, blue, and green, depending on the angle. *I feel like a follow-up act to the feather...*

Lou stood on my other side, and Sakaki protected me from the back.

“Are you ready? Okay, let’s go.”

“Presenting Lady Serephione Granzeus of the Kingdom of Judore!”

The announcer read my name off. A clamor broke out in the room.

“It’s the Twilight Fairy I keep hearing about...”

“The ultimate weapon of the Trundles...”

“Why is our empress some little girl from Judore...?!”

“Eeee, Sir Arthur! Why would you escort such a lowly girl?!”

“H-Hey, her hair! Is that from our sacred bird?!”

Ah, this brings me back. I remembered being all alone in the novel, shown off to the public, kneeling before the emperor, and vowing to be his vassal. I had been subject to all kinds of abuse from the Galéan soldiers.

Compared to then...I was so much better off.

After all, I had Lou at my side. Sakaki was accompanying me with a calm air. Even Arthur was helping me with this event.

People spread to make a path to the throne for me. Gillain was watching from the throne, his elbow rested on his armrest as if he were bored, and Asu shone brilliantly on his shoulder.

I had to do my greeting and speech on my own, since I didn't have my father with me. I mulled over how to start as a noble lady, but decided not to worry about it. I'd managed on my own in my past life. I'd do the same this time out of respect to that past version of me.

I walked up to Gillain with Arthur. Arthur started to bend his knees, but I held my fan out to stop him. His eyes went wide in surprise, and he took a step back. The audience whispered. Gillain raised his left eyebrow.

I bowed at Gillain's feet like a knight. “My name is Serephione Granzeus. I vow my undying loyalty and protection to Emperor Gillain for the rest of my days. Even if my body deteriorates, please allow me to serve you as a spirit. May your reign be blessed.”

I'd said everything I needed to. The audience was silent—probably shocked that what I'd said hadn't been what they expected from a woman. It had been my true, unfiltered feelings. I would never betray Gillain. That was my announcement to the audience. Just as Gillain protected me, I too would protect Gillain!

Whoosh!

Suddenly, ten flaming blades came flying from behind me, aimed at the throne. I instantly pulled out the knives I had hidden in each sleeve, stood in

front of Gillain to deflect them all, and put each flame out individually by cutting off its oxygen supply. The room would've flooded if I'd used water.

Clap, clap, clap, clap. "Wonderful!" Regueid approached in a dress suit and applauded.

You're the one behind this?! My shoulders fell.

"That was in bad taste," I said.

"You can say that again," Lou agreed.

I glared at Regueid, who smiled and knelt at my feet. I swallowed my voice.

"I welcome you to Galé, Lady of Twilight. And once again, I pledge my loyalty to the Emperor of Galé and his peerless empress."

Sakaki, who was next to me for some reason, also knelt down and hung his head. Arthur followed quickly. Behind Regueid, one after another, military officers who, from the looks of their collars, were at least colonels, and civilian officers and nobles who didn't seem to be idiots, knelt down.

Regueid had played me like a fiddle. He'd used me to turn Galé into a monolith. I sighed and put my knives back.

Gillain suddenly put his hands around my waist from behind. "Regueid, I'm going to kill you if you ever turn a blade on Serephione again."

"As you wish."

"I hereby proclaim Serephione Granzeus to be my fiancée. Anyone who harms her from here on out will be treated as if they had harmed me. I will show no mercy. If any woman has more resolve than my Serephione, she may present herself here."

A stunned silence fell over the room. Asu spread his wings and jumped onto my shoulder from Gillain's. I could feel the shock from the people who could see him. I froze as I realized that his feathers and my hair accessory were the same.

"That was too cool of you, Sere. Leave some for Gillain," Asu teased.

"Hey, I was just set up, nothing more."

“You’re drawing attention,” Lou warned Asu. “But it’s on purpose, isn’t it?”

Asu chuckled.

Music began to play.

Gillain took my hand and led me to the center of the hall. It was customary for the emperor to have the first dance. *Now my second dance has also ended up being with Gillain...* We made sure we were in time with the music and entered the ring of high-ranking nobles.

“Are you upset that I’m not very good at dancing?” I asked.

Gillain’s eyes sparkled in amusement—a rare expression. “No, you’re exceeding my expectations. You make my heart soar. You’re my treasure.” He brought his face close to mine as he whispered, then he took my plate from my collar and kissed it. The plate glowed with magic. I could feel the blood rush to my face from the sheer intimacy of it.



“H-Hey... That plate...”

“How can she be so innocent...”

“So strong, and yet so pure...”

“It’s so cute how she’s so much more innocent than she looks...”

The audience was making quite the commotion, but I couldn’t hear them over the sound of my own heart. I was too focused on not messing up my steps as Gillain watched me.

Safe in Gillain’s arms and looked after by Asu, I surprisingly barely felt any ill will from the people of Galé at all. I felt like I could make it in the Galé Empire as Gillain’s fiancée.

“Um, Gillain, I may not be the most competent, but I’ll do my best for you.” I looked up at him, put my hand on the scar on his cheek, and put a charm on him to take away any pain he might have. This was like a routine for me! The charm worked, and I smiled in relief.

Gillain’s cheeks turned a faint pink. He closed his eyes and turned his head up.
Is he overheating?

“You...got me.”

Yeah, I thought we established that already? I tilted my head, and Gillain pulled me in, closing the distance between us and shadowing my face. He kissed the faint scar on my cheek.

“Eek!” I squealed. *Wh-What are you doing?!* I opened and closed my mouth like a goldfish.

“If you’re going to put a charm on me, I’ll put one on you. Fair and square.”

“Eeeeeek!” The room filled with screams, squeals of delight, and Regueid’s laughter.

Asu chuckled. “How adorable.”

“Ah, to be young...” Lou concurred.



It had been two whole years away from Judore. The events with Schneider and Maribelle still hung heavy in my heart, along with the plot of *Wild Rose*.

But I was surrounded by people who would protect me. I had Asu, who called me his best friend, and I had Miyu, the eternal maiden and protector of girls, who would come running whenever I called. And I had Lou, my other half, at my side. That crushing loneliness I'd once felt had gone away.

Until the conditions were right for me to return to Judore, I planned to train to become an S-rank adventurer and go on secret adventures around Galé with Lou to collect rare materials. Just like we'd decided in the countermeasure plan, I was going to live life to the fullest in this new land, and I wasn't going to let anything stop me. And I was going to support Gillain, the man who had saved me in the book and was now my beloved fiancé, so I could make him smile.

"Sere! I feel like something salty today. Let's have Marsche-style sukiyaki!" Lou suggested.

"Not cake? That's unusual!" I replied. "We'd better get some meat then."

"Ooh, I spy two devilboars tormenting some rare Galéan squirrels! That's no good! We'd better hunt them down! Let's head off into the forest along the beach!"

"All right, let's go!"

I knew Gillain, Asu, and Sakaki would come to share the meal. Even Arthur showed his face at times recently. *Well, two devilboars should be enough*, I thought—when I saw that Lou had already leapt off the balcony!

"Lou! Slow down!"

"My sukiyaki! Wait up!"

I crouched down, leapt off the balcony railing, and landed right on my beloved silver fluffball!

We were going to have a lively banquet in my detached palace tonight.

Afterword

Thank you for reading Volume 2 of *Forget Being the Villainess, I Want to Be an Adventurer!* It's thanks to your support that I was able to publish a sequel.

The first volume was about a young Serephione who struggles against her fate and gains friends as she grows, but this time, the flavor is completely different.

First of all, it includes the Boy's Night sections, which received rave reviews (?) on the web and had to be cut from Volume 1! You get to see what the boys think of Sere-Alma! Their meetings have unexpected influences in various places. I hope you enjoy it.

I also responded to cries from my elementary school boy readers that there weren't enough battle scenes by adding more fighting than in the last volume. Sere, Lou, and a mysterious new force battle using both physical weapons and magic. There may be some messy fighting, but I hope you'll cheer for Sere and believe in her future with Lou. Oh, and the genre is isekai/romance. In case you forgot.

I hope you'll read this book as if you were friends with Sere as she goes through meetings, partings, and training with gritted teeth. Spoilers end here.

Next, to continue from the previous afterword, I'd like to tell you my feelings about some more of my beloved characters.

First of all, Asu. When I started writing him, I was picturing something like a dark hero who stands indifferently on the shoulder of the world's strongest man; I pictured him refusing to listen to his master's orders when he doesn't like them...but he turned into more of a mom? Unlike the young Lou and Miyu, he discreetly watches over Sere from on high, but he's her protector nonetheless. He's Sere and Gillain's biggest supporter. I wrote him while looking at the Vermilion Bird image at Kitora Tomb.

Speaking of which, the Azure Dragon image at Kitora Tomb has limbs, but the

Azure Dragon that appears in this story doesn't. You can read this volume for more details. I'm a fan of both the old and new Azure Dragons.

Next is Mr. Kodak. He started as just one of three drunkards in Trundle Guild, but he ended up being the perfect choice to teach Sere about normalcy and common sense while she was surrounded by her extraordinary family! He went through a big change. He may seem unruly on the outside, but he gets things done when he has to. He's a man of duty who would give his life for the people he loves and believes in. He became Sere's lifelong teacher, and he's trusted deeply by Lou. I wrote him thinking about what kind of teacher I would have been glad to have as a student myself.

I can hear some people telling me to write about our main hero Gillain, but I think it'll be more fun to read if I don't give away any more information about his backstory than I need to, so I'm keeping it a secret.

By the way, I'm happy to say that this series received a manga adaptation in FLOS COMIC. I was moved just to see my characters illustrated in the light novels, but now our cute Sere and Lou are even able to move! I must have some really good karma from a past life!

I'm cheering on Serephione and her family right along with all of you as they show expressions that I wasn't able to describe fully in the book. I'll have to work harder at writing so I don't lose to the comic! It's being published for free on the web, so go check it out.

And with that, thank you again.

Thanks to my lead editor Y, who guided me gently like a Buddha—despite my complaining—and didn't hide their love for Lou, and thanks also to everyone else involved in this book's publication. Thanks to Tobi for drawing Sere ever more handsomely as she went through more conflict, and thanks to Tasuke Sakura for expanding the world of her reincarnation in the manga adaptation. I'm very grateful to all of you.

I would like to thank all the readers who have picked up this book following the first volume and all the readers who give me encouragement and advice on

the web. Thank you very much. I was able to finish writing another book because I knew you were waiting for me. Thank you for your continued support.

In my last afterword, I wrote that the new era, Reiwa, is finally here! I am very happy to be able to publish a book at this turning point of the era.

I wish you all the very best in this new time.

Hiro Oda

Fio the Snake Charmer

Serephione disguised as a boy.
Her partner is the snake spirit
Miyu!

Serephione's
starting a new
life as an
adventurer
in the
Japan-like
nation of
Marsche!

Forget Being the
VILLAINESS, I Want to Be an
ADVENTURER!

2



Heavenly
Beast of
the East
Kilamageld's
Send-Off
Ceremony

Miyu
Successor of the
heavenly beast
of the east.

Lou
Heavenly beast
of the west.

Asu
Heavenly beast
of the south.



"Can you breathe in there?"

"Mmnng..."

"My, how unseemly..."

Forget Being the
VILLAINESS, I Want to Be an
ADVENTURER!



2

Author
Hiro Oda

Illustrator
Tobi

Fio the Snake Charmer

Serephione disguised as a boy.
Her partner is the snake spirit
Miyu!

Serephione's
starting a new
life as an
adventurer
in the
Japan-like
nation of
Marsche!

Forget Being the
VILLAINESS, I Want to Be an
ADVENTURER!

2



Heavenly
Beast of
the East
Kilamageld's
Send-Off
Ceremony

Miyu
Successor of the
heavenly beast
of the east.

Lou
Heavenly beast
of the west.

Asu
Heavenly beast
of the south.



"Can you breathe in there?"

"Mmnnggh..."

"My, how unseemly..."



Sign up for our mailing list at J-Novel Club to hear about new releases!

[Newsletter](#)

And you can read the latest chapters (like Vol. 3 of this series!) by becoming a J-Novel Club Member:

[J-Novel Club Membership](#)

Copyright

Forget Being the Villainess, I Want to Be an Adventurer! Volume 2

by Hiro Oda

Translated by Kim Louise Davis Edited by Zubonjin

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright © Hiro Oda, Tobi 2019

Illustrations by Tobi

First published in Japan in 2019 by KADOKAWA CORPORATION, Tokyo English translation rights arranged with KADOKAWA CORPORATION, Tokyo All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property.

J-Novel Club LLC

j-novel.club

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

Ebook edition 1.0: March 2022